

Relationship Rehab Show

Episode 39: Parenting an Adult Child

We certainly never stop being a parent...even if our child dies or is alienated from us. Even if, in the past, you've chosen to abandon your child, that doesn't mean you are no longer a parent.

When a child you have cared for since inception grows into adulthood, however, it is necessary to change your parenting strategies. Your responsibilities have changed with this new season in your and your child's life.

You may need to define or redefine what being a good parent means. In my mind, being a good parent means giving children age-appropriate responsibilities which increase with age until they are fully capable of taking care of themselves in an adult world.

Some parents navigate this transition easily. Others fight it and try to maintain the same relationship with their child that was there during their growing-up years. Usually that back-fires.

To be a responsible parent, you don't want to keep fulfilling a young adult's responsibilities for him so that he never assumes appropriate responsibility for himself. That is called enabling. It weakens your child, creating the belief that he or she is not capable of taking care of adult responsibilities. The pattern of enabling will eventually create resentment in you toward your child.

It's up to you and your partner to decide exactly when and how much you withdraw financial or practical support from your child. It wouldn't be appropriate for me to dictate to you what is the "right" way or "right" time. Just measure your support of your child by whether or not

it is ultimately in his or her best interests...helping or hindering the growing up process.

I can't claim to have done a good job of releasing my two boys into adulthood. I vacillated between being too generous and too withholding of my financial support. It was hurtful and confusing to me and to them.

My own journey of understanding the balance between my responsibilities and theirs is documented in my book, Pungent Boundaries. If you choose to read it, the concepts in it that I understood late into my relationships with them, may help you make clearer choices.

One thing I recommend wholeheartedly is that you release each of your children to experience their own journey into adulthood. Stop giving unwanted advice. Stop the lectures. One truth about adulthood is that it's time for that young man or woman to make their own decisions and enjoy... or suffer whatever consequences come from those choices.

If asked, you can give advice...but only if asked.

The past two paragraphs are places that I eventually came to that helped my boys and I step into a place of mutual respect...an adult relationship. Giving unasked for advice is a guaranteed way to drive your child away from you.

Giving unlimited emotional support is always good parenting!

You have my love and support,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nancy Landrum". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of each word being capitalized and larger than the others.

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