



Parenting Your Young Adult

By: Kendra Woodworth, MA
Predoctoral Psychology Intern

It is becoming increasingly common for adult children to remain living with their parents. The young adult may be working towards financial independence in the job market, starting or enrolled in college, or may be searching for that first post-college job to help launch them from the nest. Either way, it can be a difficult time for both the young adult and the parents to navigate. Parents may always see their young adult as a child who needs to be protected, and the young adult wants to benefit from the support of their parents without feeling treated as a child.

Young adults are in a complex period developmentally. The brain continues to mature and develop well into the early 20s, and the choices young adults make can have long-term consequences (legally, financially, and socially) which may result in a desire for parents to intervene. Here are some tips to consider to aid in navigating the murky waters when you find yourself attempting to parent a young adult:

1. Consider the long-term goals of both you and your young adult: Do you expect and desire your young adult to live independently someday, or is it possible that your young adult may need some support with daily living skills for the remainder of their adulthood?
 - a. If the young adult is going to need life-long supports, start working with your young adult's care team to enroll in programs that will allow your young adult to be as independent as possible, while providing the supports necessary to help him or her remain safe and successful.
 - b. If the young adult is expected to transition out of the home and be successful independently, steps need to be taken to give the young adult additional responsibilities with progressively fewer familial supports. This can be difficult, and it is necessary for the young adult to learn the skills necessary to function outside of the familial home.
2. Negotiate Expectations/Rules: Your young adult is no longer a child. I know this is hard to hear, and recognizing this is very important to your relationship with your young adult. A young adult views him or herself as an adult, and is likely to become irritated or defiant if you treat him or her as a child. Yes, the young adult is still living under your roof and some rules and expectations are understandable; however, setting rules will feel parental to your young adult, and is unlikely to be perceived as being in their best interest. Instead, try to negotiate with the young adult on expectations and consequences. Will the young adult be expected to chip in financially? Are there household chores that need to be completed in addition to or in lieu of rent? What areas is the young adult comfortable with the parent intervening (e.g., medical, parenting if a grandchild is also living in the home) and what is off limits (e.g., parents cannot criticize if the young adult's room is clean, as long as the common areas are kept in order)? The young adult and parents are allowed to have expectations and courtesies expected from the other party, and having these discussed in advance can reduce difficulties and arguments later.

3. Pretend your young adult is a stranger: I know this sounds weird, but bear with me. Would you let a stranger live in your home without meeting the agreed upon expectations? Why is it any different for your young adult? I'm not advocating for randomly evicting your young adult, but our world has very real consequences. If a person does not pay their rent at an apartment, they will soon no longer have an apartment. Help your young adult learn to function in the real world, and allow realistic and natural consequences to play out. Similarly, it helps to have all terms that have been negotiated in writing. This will allow both the young adult and the parents to come back to the agreement when the terms are not being met without it feeling as parental or condescending to the young adult. In the short term it may seem like a pain, but in the long-term your relationship with your young adult will benefit.

4. Let them fail: Again, many parents have a difficult time with this one but please try to hear me out. Most parents want their children to be able to go out into the world (at least someday) and manage life successfully. Part of learning to do that requires making a decision, taking risks, and sometimes failing. If an independent adult does not pay their rent, he or she will get evicted. If an independent adult does not plan a ride to work, he or she will get fired. If we always fix our young adult's mistakes, they will not develop the necessary problem-solving skills and/or learn how to think on their feet. When we intervene the short term outcome might be better, and the young adult might experience less distress; however, it also fosters a dependency where the young adult will feel a need for us to take over for the next 10 difficult experiences. While it can be difficult, letting them make mistakes and fail while living in your home will better prepare them for independent living. When your young adult does make these mistakes, try not to say "I told you so." Instead, ask them what alternatives they think might have been better and reinforce what they learned from the experience.

5. Manage your own emotional well-being: This is one of the most important and often the easiest to forget. Parenting is challenging and can be very exhausting. Parenting a young adult, while different, can still be very stressful. Taking steps to manage your own distress and frustration will be beneficial to your own health, and the development of your young adult. Use your social supports! Talk to friends or family, plan a fun activity to get away from your home, or talk to a therapist. Remember that this is a very stressful time for you, and it is important that you take the time and energy to take care of yourself.

Main Office: 5125 County Road 101, Suite 300, Minnetonka, MN 55345 952-932-7277

Chaska Branch Office: 1107 Hazeltine Blvd., Suite 121, Chaska, MN 55121

www.relatemn.org