

Home Again

What to Expect When Your Adult Child with ADHD Returns Home to Live

by Philip Kronk, MS, PhD

ADULT CHILDREN are returning home in greater numbers than ever before. Nearly one in eight adults returns to their parents' home.

There are many reasons for their return home, including crushing financial student debt and an inability to find a job or obtain an initial foothold in an entry-level career, necessitating a try at graduate school.

The media has given us many different names for these adults who return home: “emerging adults,” “boomerang children,” and individuals who exhibit a “failure to launch.”

However, what if your adult child, who returns home to live with you, also has ADHD?

Should parents expect something different or extra because their returning adult child has ADHD? How can parents be of help?

What issues from the past should parents suspect will re-emerge in their now adult-to-adult relationship? Raising and disciplining a child with ADHD can be rewarding but also frustrating at times. Will similar issues and areas of potential family stress reappear when your adult child with ADHD returns home?



Academic issues and financial stress

The adult who returns home to live often has two personal areas of stress: school and finances. Let us look at school issues first.

Parents of children with ADHD remember well the early challenges of academic achievement. Parents know that academic success leads to mastery, self-esteem, and career success. However, for many parents, educating a child with ADHD had been frustrating, especially if their child had comorbid conditions, such as a learning disability, an oppositional defiant disorder or anxiety.

When their adult child returns home, parents may be faced with a renewed specter of potential academic failure, bringing up old, unresolved feelings of anger, guilt, and blame around academic issues.

Will parents forget their past mistakes and unhelpful lectures? Could they mistake their adult child's depression and despair for a lack of motivation and caring for academic achievement?

Will parents try to over-control their adult child; or will they retreat from offering any support due to feelings of uncertainty or a desire to not do more harm or cause more trouble?

Parents must reach out and emotionally support their adult child, who once again has his or her self-esteem damaged and diminished by fears of being a failure. Or will past memories be too painful for both?

Then there is the money issue. What will parents do

about their adult child with ADHD and the very large financial elephant in the room... his or her overwhelming and crushing financial debt, often from student loans that seem to have given few career benefits or future options?

Social and emotional issues

There may also be social issues. Will parents become very anxious and worried again when their adult child isolates from them and his or her peers? Will painful memories of adolescent isolation and rejection reemerge for both?

Or will parents feel angered by behaviors that they feel may have contributed to their child's academic failures, such as drug use and excessive alcohol consumption? Will parents know when to push or when to take a step back?

Will there be a battle again over whether their child is taking his or her prescribed medications for ADHD? And will there be a need for additional medications for anxiety or depression? Or a need for supportive counseling?

Some parents will wonder if they should rescue the adult child with ADHD or allow natural consequences to follow. Will they need to give guidance and advice over how to improve their child's weak executive functioning skills again? The brain's executive functioning skills continue to develop for many throughout the college years.

Could parents be seeing a lack of adequate coping skills and poor executive functioning skills in their children or is there an entirely new challenge? Is the returning child burdened by something more emotionally pathological than ADHD?

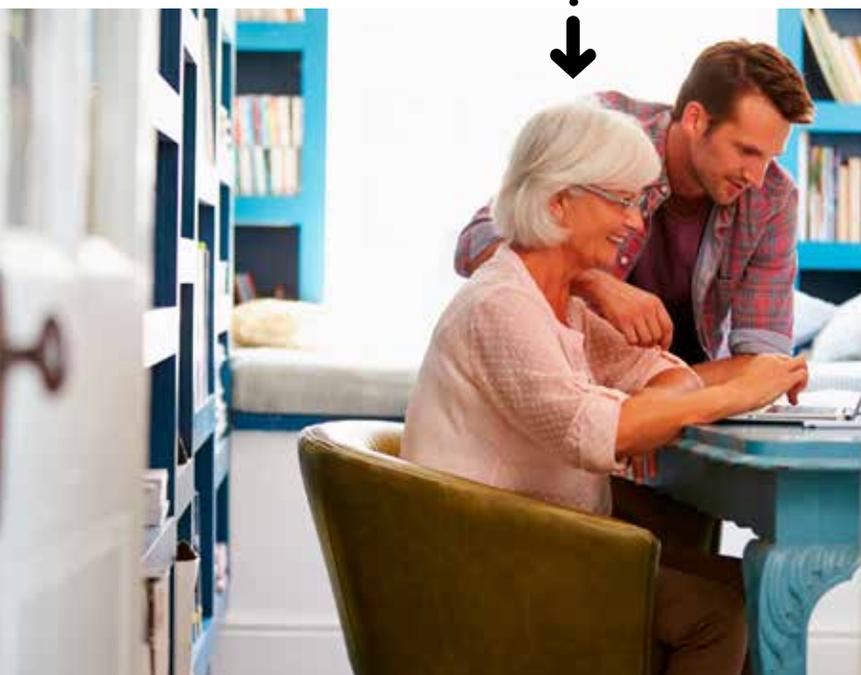
Mental health professionals know that many mental disorders show themselves during these years, starting often from ages 17 and older. Significant mental illnesses, such as schizophrenia, can develop at this age, as the brain's neurons are developmentally "pruned" but not replaced by new ones for some individuals.

And what about the parents' feelings, if they had finally become accustomed to their "empty nest," only to find another adult making decisions about household routines and rituals?

What parents can do

As you can see, there is much to be concerned about when your adult child with ADHD returns home. What can you do? You can be as prepared as possible before he or she comes home.

First, if you are a two-person family now, you must speak, at length, with your spouse. This is the most important thing you can do. If younger children are still in the home, they should also be involved in the preparation and planning of your adult child's return.





First, honestly discuss past differences over discipline styles. Discuss what you both feel are normal limits for another adult living in your home. Always discuss making tighter rules and boundaries in the beginning. It is always easier to loosen a rule than to make one more restricted.

Make sure that you and your spouse will continue to have private time together as a couple, and not just return to your old identity of just being a parent. Plan to have regular date nights and dinners out together, without your child.

You and your spouse will need to have a mental list of expectations, guidelines, behaviors, and boundaries ready before your child moves back home. Then, you need to sit down with him or her and negotiate any areas where there is discomfit. Be upfront about what specific areas you and your spouse will not compromise on. Drug or alcohol use, shared chores, and established household routines that you do not want changed must all be discussed.

Welcome your child back with love and concern, but set initial expectations. Remind yourselves that ADHD is not just a developmental disorder of childhood. Your support and wisdom as parents may still be needed as ADHD impacts on adulthood also.

Initial communication will not be enough. You and your child should agree to formal discussions scheduled weekly or every ten days, no matter how much time is spent talking, agreeing or arguing. It will be easy to fall into old patterns, to become punitive, or to isolate from each other if household stress increases.

Above all, remind yourselves of all you have learned as parents who raised a child with ADHD. Your experiences, your past successes and your past difficulties, may have all led to this moment for you and your child.

You still have much to teach your child what it means to be a caring, concerned parent. Some lessons may not come easily to your child; perhaps, it will fall to his own children to teach him the true joys and doubts of raising a child with ADHD. ♡

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