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Thunder Bay Counselling Centre Newsletter
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For You & Your Family

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Moving on from Adolescence

Life changes? They can be scary, especially when you move from the teen years and into young adulthood. Your adult child may be moving across the city or across the country or even to another part of the world. Things are going to change!



Emotional Considerations

That Last Year Of High School

The transition to the world post high school may actually start during their final year. Writer and expert on the world of teens, Michael Riera Ph.D., states that many households undergo a degree of stress and arguing around graduation time. This arguing is often a result of the excitement and anxiety that comes with change. Arguing is often a conduit for the adult child and the parents 'moving' away from each other in preparation for the next phase. So teens, parents and teachers, if you find yourself in this place, now is the time to have a conversation about what is really happening!

In *Uncommon Sense for Parents with Teenagers*, one student said the following about his last year:

"During the second semester of my senior year I was a real jerk to my teachers and parents. I was angry and moody most of the time. I argued with teachers about assignments, skipped school, went to school stoned, and played rude pranks on people. At home I was even worse. I don't know why. I was just angry at everyone around me. Everyone was relieved by the time I graduated. But a couple of years later I came back to the school for a game. It was the first time I had been back since graduation. And I know it sounds corny, but all of a sudden it made sense: I had felt I was being 'thrown' out of high school. So, rather than get 'tossed' out, I unconsciously decided to reject them first. I really loved high school, but I had been too scared about leaving to face up to it. Somehow it was easier to get angry."

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Leaving Home

When teens/young adults first leave home, there can be a variety of responses to that huge step depending on the person in question. Some make that move with leaps and bounds and unbridled enthusiasm while others may be more fearful and cautious. Often your adult child may be reluctant to admit that they are a little fearful. It's a good idea to help your young person normalize their feelings. You might share what it was like for you, for this transition and other transitions you have experienced.

Safety Net

What might provide your teen with their confidence about these changes is to offer them a 'safety net' of sorts. While this may be difficult if they are moving out of town, it may be comforting for your adult child to know that it's okay for him to come home if he is homesick, needs to talk or just be with family. Adult children and their parents can be thankful for media such as Skype, where you can connect with them from as far away as Australia! They need to know that they can always come home again.

Homesickness

You are eager to leave home and start your new life! You have made the move, in your new place, new city but all of a sudden you are feeling homesick. This is natural. After all, you have lived with your family for all of your life, it's natural to feel emotions around that shift. What does being homesick feel like? When you're homesick, you might feel nostalgic for all of the things that seemed so much a part of your life, like family, friends, pets and even the annoying things (like your little sister borrowing your clothes, your little brother following you everywhere you go). It can be the simplest of things as well, like your bedroom, that familiar dent in your pillow, your parents' home, or the old neighborhood. Familiar surroundings, long time friends, and routines provide a sense of security and comfort. In a new place, you may find yourself missing the comforts of home and family and all that is familiar.

What things do you think you'll miss when you leave home?

What To Do When You are Homesick

Some people may only feel a little loneliness, sadness, or anxiety. Others may feel physical symptoms, like stomachaches or headaches, or even become truly depressed. Most of the time, once the new surroundings and people become more familiar, feelings of homesickness go away.

But if you are feeling overwhelmed, it's a good idea to seek help.

- **Bring something that reminds you of home.** Pack photos or letters or a favorite stuffed animal, sleep shirt, or pillow. When you start longing for familiar faces and places, you'll have a little bit of home right there with you.
- **Call home when you can.** This probably seems obvious, but during extended stays away, a quick call to hear your dad's voice or your sister's story about bathing the dog can be comforting. You might want to arrange a time to call or even visit (if you'll be gone for a while) so you'll have something to look forward to.
- **Do something you enjoy.** When you're having fun, you're less likely to spend time thinking about people and things you miss.
- **Talk to a friend,** ideally someone who's going through the same experience you are. Knowing you're not the only one dealing with this can take the sting out of feeling a little lonely, and you might feel better when you cheer up someone else.
- **Write in a journal.** Putting your feelings down on paper can help you understand them. Maybe writing about homesickness will show you what you really miss, whether it's your cat or the smell of waffles on Saturday mornings. Then you can find a way to ease that ache, like asking your parents to send a picture of your pet.
- **Stay active.** If you sit on the sidelines, you'll have more time to think about feeling sad. Talk to people and throw yourself into activities, and before you know it, you'll be too busy to be homesick.
- **Review your expectations.** Sometimes feelings of sadness may also be feelings of disappointment when a camp, school, or trip doesn't live up to your dreams. You may need to readjust what it is that you want to get out of your experience.
- **Talk to an adult.** Missing your family and home is normal. But, if after a couple of days away, you're having trouble eating or sleeping or you're not interested in doing anything, talk to an adult you trust about your feelings. That person can help you work through this tough time.

Almost everyone has felt homesick at some time. Remember that there's a good side to homesickness, too: It means you have family and friends worth missing and a place you want to return to when your adventure away from home is over. ••

(teenshealth.org)

The Practical Realities of Leaving Home

Sometimes youth are leaving home to attend university, some for jobs out of town or in town. Whatever the situation, there are some practicalities to consider!

Where are you going to live?

You will need to think about your budget and a location close to work or school to avoid lengthy transportation costs and time. Will you share the costs and live with a roommate? How will you find this roommate?

What to further consider:

- Co-habiting provides the opportunity to make new friends
- Safety—living with others can provide extra security.

Some of the negatives of sharing the rent can include:

- issues with roommates who don't pay bills/rent on time
- differences in lifestyle or values that may cause conflict.

Some young people deal with these issues by establishing clear ground rules with their roommates right from the beginning!

Moving to a New City and Making Friends

Often the biggest challenge when moving to another city is making new friends. You may have to accept the fact that it will take time and you may have to add to your friends list one person at a time.

Where might you connect with like-minded people?

- Volunteer at agencies or causes you believe in - chances are there will be people there that you share interests with
- Do you attend church, clubs, hobbies, theatre?
- Are you interested in sports? Opportunity to meet people may lie with participation in sporting and leisure activities.

Certainly it's more of a challenge to people who prefer solitary activities such as reading, watching tv, hanging out at home, but here is an opportunity to step outside your comfort zone. Many communities have book clubs.

The idea is that friends may come to you but more than likely you will have to seek out friends. This may take effort and patience! ••

Youth in Transition from the Child Protection System



Transition to the next stage of life may be particularly challenging to those youth who are under the care of the child protection system. Protection ends at age 21 or even younger. "At this point in their lives, youth no longer have access to any of the people and systems they have previously turned to for assistance and assume sole responsibility for their employment, education, housing, and overall health and well-being". (Nancy Chamberlain, ED, Thunder Bay Counselling Centre)

Research relayed by "A Blueprint for Fundamental Change to Ontario's Child Welfare System" indicates that 44 percent of youth in care complete high school compared to 82 percent of Ontario's general youth population.

A Call For Help!

The Centre of Excellence for Children's Well-Being states that, "research indicates that youths who age out of care encounter a number of challenges in the transition to adulthood. In the years after leaving care, they are at risk to experience unemployment, homelessness or housing instability, get into trouble with the law, and have children at a young age."

According to Della Knoke (writing for the Centre's of Excellence for Children's Well-Being), preparation for independent living should begin when youth in foster care are between 12 and 16 years of age. Preparation needs to include training to develop competency in a range of life skills, including searching for and obtaining jobs, managing money, obtaining housing, understanding rental/leasing agreements, and skills for daily living such as banking, meal planning, self-care, and work/study habits. Programs should also teach interpersonal communication skills, and strategies for managing stress and leisure time, and also provide transition planning or counselling to help youths to identify pathways to achieving their goals. ••



The Places You Will Go...

Dr. Suess' Oh, the Places You'll Go, is the last book he published and is a popular gift for youth who are graduating from high school because of its messages about moving forward in life. The book can be purchased from most bookstores, online bookstores, and the story may be available on the internet. Here are some highlights:

"You have brains in your head. You have feet in your shoes. You can steer yourself any direction you choose. You're on your own. And you know what you know. And YOU are the one who'll decide where to go..."

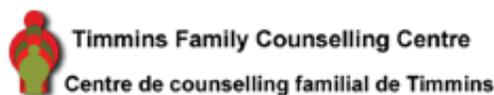
"You'll get mixed up, of course, as you already know. You'll get mixed up with many strange birds as you go. So be sure when you step, step with care and great tact and remember that Life's a Great Balancing Act. Just never forget to be dexterous and deft. And never mix up your right foot with your left."

"And when you're alone there's a very good chance you'll meet things that scare you right out of your pants. There are some, down the road between hither and yon, that can scare you so much you won't want to go on."

"You will come to a place where the streets are not marked. Some windows are lighted but mostly they're darked. A place you could sprain both your elbow and chin! Do you dare to stay out? Do you dare to go in? How much can you lose? How much can you win?"

"And will you succeed? Yes! You will, indeed! (98 and 3/4 percent guaranteed). Kid, you'll move mountains!" ••

Helping people is what we're all about.



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