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Empty Nest Syndrome Clinical Practice Workbook

A clinically branded, function-preserving edition retaining the original exercises, psychoeducation, checklists, logs, planning tools, and response space.

DSM-5-TR · ICD-11 CLINICAL ALIGNMENT

1 · How Are You Coping?

2 · Address Feelings of Loss

3 · Coping with Grief

4 · Coping with Feelings of Loneliness

5 · Create a Sense of Purpose

6 · Reconnect With Hobbies Or Interests

7 · Embrace Change

8 · Spend Quality Time With Your Partner

How to use this workbook

- Use this workbook selectively and collaboratively; it is educational and does not replace individualized assessment, diagnosis, treatment, medical care, or crisis services.
- Skip, pause, or modify any activity that increases distress, danger, shame, or loss of functioning. Adapt language for culture, disability, neurodivergence, health, resources, and lived context.
- Ratings in this workbook are reflection tools unless a named, validated measure and interpretation are explicitly provided.

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How Are You Coping?

The following are common signs you might be struggling with empty nest syndrome. Rate each statement on a scale from 1-5 (1 being “strongly disagree” and 5 being “strongly agree”):

Statement	Rate (1-5)
1. “I feel like I don't have a purpose anymore without my children around.”	1-2-3-4-5
2. “It's hard to adjust to an empty house after years of constant noise and activity.”	1-2-3-4-5
3. “I struggle to find joy or motivation in activities that used to make me happy.”	1-2-3-4-5
4. “Even simple tasks like cooking for one or doing laundry feel overwhelming and lonely.”	1-2-3-4-5
5. “I find myself reminiscing about the past and feeling sad about things that I used to take for granted.”	1-2-3-4-5
6. “I constantly worry that my children don't need me anymore and that they're better off without me.”	1-2-3-4-5
7. “I feel like my life is on hold while I wait for my children to visit or call.”	1-2-3-4-5
8. “I feel like I'm in a constant state of sadness or grief about my children moving out.”	1-2-3-4-5
9. “My relationship with my partner feels different now that our focus isn't on raising children together.”	1-2-3-4-5
10. “I find myself avoiding spaces in my home or community that remind me of my children.”	1-2-3-4-5

Score: ____/50 (The score reflects the severity and impact of your empty nest syndrome.)

Address Feelings of Loss

1. Identify the specific feelings of loss you are experiencing. The following are some examples. Check off the ones you relate to or add more to the list:

- ☐ Loss of daily interaction with children
- ☐ Loss of purpose as a primary caregiver
- ☐ Loss of control over your children's lives
- ☐ Loss of the constant noise and activity in the house
- ☐ Loss of the sense of being needed on a minute-to-minute basis
- ☐ Loss of the routine and structure that parenting provided
- ☐ Loss of the joy associated with witnessing your children's milestones
- ☐ Loss of the feeling of being a protector and provider for your children
- ☐ Loss of the feeling of being the center of your children's world
- ☐ Loss of the traditions and rituals you shared as a family
- ☐ Loss of the support and help your children provided in day-to-day tasks
- ☐ Loss of the shared hobbies and interests you had with your children
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

2. Reflect on why these losses are significant to you. What meaning did these aspects of your role as a parent hold for you?

3. Explore any fears or worries that arise from these losses. Are there any deeper concerns or anxieties underlying your feelings? The following are some common examples. Check off the ones you relate to or add more to the list:

- ☐ Fear of being alone or deserted
- ☐ Fear of not knowing how to fill the void left by your children
- ☐ Fear of losing your identity as a parent
- ☐ Fear of no longer having a purpose or goal
- ☐ Fear of losing the connection with your adult children
- ☐ Fear of not being needed or wanted anymore
- ☐ Fear of not knowing how to navigate new social situations without children around
- ☐ Fear of boredom or lack of stimulation
- ☐ Fear of developing health problems due to stress or depression
- ☐ Fear of losing friends who were primarily based on your children's connections
- ☐ Fear of losing the sense of family and belonging
- ☐ Fear of being left behind in terms of technology or cultural trends
- ☐ Fear of having regrets about not spending enough quality time with your children

- ☐ Fear of not knowing how to communicate with your adult children in a new way
- ☐ Fear of not being able to fulfill new goals or aspirations
- ☐ Fear of not knowing how to take care of yourself without prioritizing your children's needs
- ☐ Fear of not knowing how to process grief or sadness associated with being an empty nester
- ☐ Fear of not having the same level of energy or vitality as before
- ☐ Fear of feeling guilty about enjoying your newfound freedom
- ☐ Fear of not being able to establish new connections or relationships
- ☐ Fear of not being able to adjust to a new routine or lifestyle
- ☐ Fear of not being able to relate to your children's new life stages or challenges
- ☐ Fear of not being able to maintain a healthy relationship with a partner or spouse without focusing on children
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

4. Challenge your fears by answering the following questions:

Fear: _____

****What evidence supports my fear?**** Look for concrete examples or experiences that reinforce your fear. Ask yourself if these instances are isolated or representative of a bigger pattern.

****What evidence contradicts my fear?**** Identify any past experiences or examples where you successfully coped with change or managed challenging situations. Consider other individuals who have successfully transitioned through the empty nest phase.

****What alternative perspectives are there?**** Try to look at the empty nest phase from different angles. Consider how it might also bring new opportunities for personal growth, self-discovery, and the strengthening of other relationships.

****What strategies can I use to cope with my fear?**** Brainstorm various coping strategies that can help you manage your fears and anxieties. Consider seeking support from friends, joining support groups, or engaging in activities that bring joy and fulfillment.

****What positive outcomes can come from this transition?**** Challenge yourself to identify potential positive outcomes of the empty nest phase. Reflect on the newfound freedom, personal growth, and time for self-care that can arise during this period.

5. Set Realistic Expectations. Recognize that it's normal to feel a mix of emotions during this period of change. Setting realistic expectations for yourself and allowing for a period of adjustment can help ease some of the fears associated with the empty nest.

Coping with Grief

1. Identifying Losses:

Take time to reflect on the specific losses you are experiencing as your children leave the home.

2. Exploring Emotions:

Write about the range of emotions you are feeling, such as sadness, loneliness, anxiety, or even relief. Acknowledge that it's okay to experience a mix of emotions during this transition.

3. Recognizing Changes:

List the ways in which your daily routine, roles, and responsibilities have shifted since your children left. This could involve changes in household dynamics, meal preparations, or how you spend your free time.

4. Coping Strategies:

Brainstorm healthy coping mechanisms that can help you navigate these changes. This might involve seeking support from friends, engaging in new hobbies, or setting aside time for self-care activities.

6. Support System:

Identify individuals in your life who can offer support as you navigate this transition. This may include friends, family members, or support groups for empty nesters.

7. Memories and Reflection:

Consider creating a keepsake or memory box filled with mementos from your children's upbringing. Allow yourself to reminisce and honor the memories while acknowledging the new chapter in your life.

Coping with Feelings of Loneliness

1. Identify Your Emotions:

Start by identifying the specific emotions you are feeling related to loneliness. Write down any feelings of sadness, isolation, or longing for companionship.

2. Understand the Triggers:

Reflect on what triggers your feelings of loneliness. Write down specific situations or events that tend to make you feel more alone. The following are some common example. Check off the ones you relate to or add more to the list:

- ☐ Coming home to an empty house after work or social activities.
- ☐ Seeing empty bedrooms or spaces that were once occupied by your children.
- ☐ Attending family events or gatherings without your children present.
- ☐ Celebrating holidays or special occasions without your children.
- ☐ Hearing about or seeing other parents spending time with their adult children.
- ☐ Receiving fewer phone calls or messages from your children.
- ☐ Observing younger parents with their children and reminiscing about when your children were younger.

- ☐ Facing retirement or a sudden change in lifestyle without the presence of your children.
- ☐ Struggling to adjust to a quieter and less chaotic household.
- ☐ Dealing with physical reminders of your children being away, such as their belongings or absence of their presence.
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

3. Practice Self-Compassion

Be kind to yourself and acknowledge that it's normal to feel lonely at times. Write down positive affirmations or compassionate statements to remind yourself that your feelings are valid. The following are some examples to inspire you:

- ☐ "It's natural to feel lonely when the dynamics of my family have changed."
- ☐ "I am allowed to grieve the changes in my life and the absence of my children."
- ☐ "I am worthy of love, attention, and companionship, even when my children are not physically present."
- ☐ _____

4. Reach Out for Support:

Identify individuals or support groups you can turn to for comfort and companionship. Write down the names of friends, family members, or community resources you can connect with when you're feeling lonely.

Create a Sense of Purpose

1. Reflect on Your Values:

List three values that are important to you. The following are some examples to inspire you:

☐ Adventure	☐ Growth	☐ Organization
☐ Authenticity	☐ Happiness	☐ Patience
☐ Balance	☐ Harmony	☐ Peace
☐ Boldness	☐ Health	☐ Perseverance
☐ Commitment	☐ Honesty	☐ Reliability
☐ Community	☐ Humility	☐ Resilience
☐ Contribution	☐ Humor	☐ Respect
☐ Creativity	☐ Independence	☐ Self-discipline
☐ Empathy	☐ Kindness	☐ Service
☐ Fairness	☐ Leadership	☐ Simplicity
☐ Flexibility	☐ Love	☐ Spirituality
☐ Freedom	☐ Loyalty	☐ Tranquility
☐ Fun	☐ Open-	☐ Uniqueness
☐ Generosity	☐ mindedness	☐ Well-being
☐ Gratitude	☐ Optimism	☐ Wisdom

My top 3 values:

How have your values evolved over the years?

2. Identify Personal Goals:

What are some personal goals you would like to achieve in the next year?

Consider your long-term aspirations. What are some dreams you have for the future?

3. Exploring New Opportunities:

Research different activities or volunteer opportunities that align with your passions and values. List three new activities or opportunities you are interested in exploring.

4. Strengthening Relationships:

Reflect on your relationships with friends and family. How can you nurture these relationships during this stage of life?

5. Giving Back and Making a Difference:

Consider ways you can give back to your community or a cause that is meaningful to you.

Reconnect With Hobbies Or Interests

1. Identify past hobbies or interests:

Make a list of hobbies or interests that you used to enjoy before your children left home. Following are some examples. Check off the ones you used to enjoy or want to try:

- ☐ Photography
- ☐ Writing (journaling, creative writing, blogging)
- ☐ Painting
- ☐ Yoga or meditation
- ☐ Playing a musical instrument
- ☐ Gardening
- ☐ Knitting or crocheting
- ☐ Woodworking
- ☐ Hiking or walking in nature
- ☐ Joining a book club or starting a reading group
- ☐ DIY home improvement projects
- ☐ Fishing or angling
- ☐ Sewing or quilting
- ☐ Pottery or ceramics
- ☐ Camping or RV travel
- ☐ Learning to play chess or other strategy games
- ☐ Beekeeping or starting a small garden for honeybees
- ☐ Candle making or soap making
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

2. Reflect on barriers or challenges:

Consider any barriers or challenges that may have prevented you from pursuing these hobbies in the past. This could include lack of time, limited resources, or feelings of guilt or neglecting responsibilities.

3. Explore adjustments or modifications:

Think about how you can make adjustments or modifications to overcome these barriers. Can you carve out specific time in your schedule for pursuing your hobbies? Are there any local clubs, groups, or classes that you can join to meet like-minded individuals and enhance your experience? Can you involve your partner or friends in these activities?

4. Set realistic goals:

Set realistic goals for yourself when it comes to re-engaging with your hobbies or interests. Start small and gradually increase your involvement. For example, if reading was a hobby you enjoyed, set a goal to read a certain number of books per month or join a book club.

Embrace Change

1. Consider changes you need to make:

The following are some examples of changes empty nesters may need to consider. Check off the ones you need to make or add more to the list:

- ☐ Downsizing to a smaller home
- ☐ Adjusting financial planning
- ☐ Reevaluating career choices
- ☐ Focusing on health and wellness
- ☐ Adopting pets
- ☐ Embracing technology to stay connected with their adult children
- ☐ Planning for retirement
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

2. Identify opportunities:

Think about new opportunities that can arise from this transition. For example, you may have more time to travel, pursue a hobby, or take on a new job. Write down as many opportunities as you can think of.

3. Overcome obstacles:

Identify any challenges you anticipate encountering in this next phase of life. They may include financial concerns or difficulty adjusting to a new routine. Brainstorm ways to overcome these obstacles or seek help from a professional if needed.

4. Create a plan:

Finally, use all of the information you've gathered to create a plan for how you will embrace change and thrive in your new role as an empty nester. Include specific goals and steps you will take to achieve them.

Spend Quality Time With Your Partner

1. Set aside dedicated time:

Pick a specific day or time each week when you and your partner can spend uninterrupted quality time together.

2. Plan activities together:

Sit down with your partner and brainstorm activities you both enjoy or want to try. The following are some examples. Check off the ones you want to try or add more to the list:

- ☐ Take a leisurely stroll in the park.
- ☐ Go on a scenic drive and explore new areas.
- ☐ Have a picnic in your backyard or a nearby park.
- ☐ Volunteer together at a local charity or organization.
- ☐ Play board games or cards together.
- ☐ Take up a new hobby such as painting or knitting.
- ☐ Explore your local library and join a book club.
- ☐ Attend concerts or live performances in your area.
- ☐ Try out new restaurants or have a romantic dinner at home.
- ☐ Go camping or plan a weekend getaway in a cabin.
- ☐ Take up gardening and grow your own plants or vegetables.
- ☐ Go for a bike ride in a nearby trail or park.
- ☐ Watch classic movies or binge-watch your favorite TV shows.
- ☐ Attend community events or festivals in your city.

- ☐ Start a small home renovation project together.
- ☐ Create a scrapbook or photo album of your memories.
- ☐ Attend local lectures or workshops on topics you're interested in.
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

3. Communication and active listening:

Practice active listening skills by maintaining eye contact and fully engaging in conversations with your partner. Encourage open and honest communication. The following are some prompts you may use to start the conversation:

- ☐ What are your goals for this stage of life?
- ☐ What are some of the most important lessons you've learned over the years?
- ☐ What is your greatest fear now that the children have left the nest?
- ☐ How has our relationship changed over the years? What has stayed consistent?
- ☐ What do you think makes our relationship strong?
- ☐ What do you think are some common misconceptions about being an empty nester?
- ☐ How can we support each other during this transition?
- ☐ What is your idea of a perfect day together?
- ☐ How can we maintain a sense of purpose now that our children have grown up?
- ☐ How can we keep our relationship fresh and exciting?
- ☐ How do you want to be remembered?

- ☐ What are some of the most meaningful experiences we've shared together?
- ☐ What is the most challenging aspect of being an empty nester for you?
- ☐ What are some of your favorite memories from our time raising our children?
- ☐ How has our communication style evolved over the years?
- ☐ What is the best advice you've ever received in your life?
- ☐ What are some things we can do to stay physically active and healthy?
- ☐ How has technology impacted our relationship? What changes would you like to make?
- ☐ What are some of your regrets in life?
- ☐ What are your biggest fears for the future?
- ☐ What do you think are some of the benefits of being an empty nester?
- ☐ What are some things you're looking forward to in the next phase of our lives?
- ☐ How can we continue to show love and appreciation for one another?
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

4. Express appreciation and gratitude:

Take a moment each day to express gratitude and appreciation for your partner. It could be a simple verbal acknowledgment or a handwritten note.

2026 Clinical Alignment

DSM-5-TR (including Sept. 2025 update) · ICD-11 CDDR / 2026 MMS

Classification status

- DSM-5-TR: ·Empty Nest Syndrome· is not a standalone DSM-5-TR diagnosis · non-diagnostic or contextual/quasi-diagnostic construct
- ICD-11 CDDR: No dedicated ICD-11 CDDR mental-disorder code under this title · non-diagnostic or contextual construct
- This workbook is non-diagnostic. A title, checklist, or completed activity never establishes a diagnosis.

Pages requiring the updated interpretation

- The audit identified source pages 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23. The statements below supersede incompatible diagnostic, scoring, safety, or resource wording on those pages.

Diagnostic and differential limits

- A symptom checklist or self-rating cannot establish diagnosis. Any diagnostic discussion must address clinically significant distress/impairment, required course or duration where applicable, developmental and cultural context, substance/medication and medical causes, comorbidity, exclusions, and reasonable differentials without reproducing copyrighted criteria.

Document-specific corrections

- Describe Empty Nest Syndrome as a contextual, functional, occupational, umbrella, or proposed construct-not a confirmed diagnosis-unless a separately recognized disorder is assessed.
- Where Empty Nest Syndrome discusses symptoms, add the missing diagnostic frame: clinically meaningful distress/impairment, relevant course or duration, exclusions, developmental and cultural context, substance/medication or medical causes, and plausible differentials.
- Supersede diagnostic-sounding scoring on pages [2, 4]: disclose whether each tool is validated or author-created, remove unsupported thresholds, and separate symptom monitoring from diagnosis.
- Replace crisis wording on pages [2] with the current U.S. 988 call/text/chat pathway, 911 or nearest emergency department for immediate danger/medical emergency, and a direction to use verified local services outside the United States.

Measures, scoring, and permissions

- Pages [2, 4] contain named, implied, or author-created screening/rating content . These scores are not diagnostic unless the exact instrument, version, validation population, administration, and interpretation are established. Identify provenance for every item set and scoring rule. Obtain publisher permission/license when required; otherwise remove cutoffs and label it as a nonvalidated reflection checklist, or replace it with a properly licensed measure without altering its wording/scoring.

Intervention scope and contraindications

- Use Empty Nest Syndrome activities as psychoeducation and structured reflection, not diagnosis or a stand-alone treatment plan. Adapt or stop any exercise that worsens distress, functioning, conflict, pain, or dissociation, and escalate care according to the actual presentation.

Crisis and current resources

- For Empty Nest Syndrome, use: ·If there is immediate danger or a medical emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department. In the U.S., call or text 988 or use 988lifeline.org for 24/7 crisis support. Outside the U.S., use verified local emergency and crisis services.· Verify all topic-specific agencies and links at publication.

Authoritative references

- <https://www.psychiatry.org/psychiatrists/practice/dsm/updates-to-dsm/updates-to-dsm-5-tr-criteria-text>
- <https://www.psychiatry.org/getmedia/b68a5776-f88c-45c7-9535-fd219d7aa5cb/APA-DSM5TR-Update-September-2025.pdf>
- <https://icd.who.int/browse/2026-01/mms/en>
- <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240077263>

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- <https://www.samhsa.gov/mental-health/988>
- <https://www.samhsa.gov/mental-health/national-behavioral-health-crisis-care>
- <https://988lifeline.org/>