

Top 5 Ways to Prepare For an Empty Nest



"Empty nest syndrome isn't a clinical diagnosis. Instead, empty nest syndrome is a phenomenon in which parents experience feelings of sadness and loss when the last child leaves home." - Mayo Clinic



Empty Nest Syndrome

It hits everyone at a different time with varied emotions.

For me, the distress came long before the kids actually left our home. It was when they started exhibiting such independence, that I felt, frankly, invisible!

For you, it might be while you pack up your first kid, your last kid, or yourself. What follows is a strange emotional withdrawal, perhaps some regret and some trepidation about the future.

We parents dump a lot of emotional energy, financial resources and weekends at the soccer field into our kids. Letting them go is not easy, but you finding your best life in the empty nest can be one of the greatest gifts you give them.

That likely sounds selfish, but stick with us and perhaps you will agree.



Step 1: Accepting Independence

"I can see on my phone that you are not in the Target parking lot." – Angry Me

"Dad, I'm telling you that we are here and nothing is going on." – Anna

"Oh sure, tell me another story. I want you to tell me the truth." – Angrier Me

"I AM, WHY DON'T YOU TRUST ME?" – Anna

Perhaps it was her older brother who had created a little skepticism when it came to times, places and truthisms.

Anyway, I sadly took my daughter Anna down these roads of mistrust more times than I care to discuss. Showing up at my neighbors house and waking everyone at 3 AM because she wasn't answering her phone got me a lot of votes for Father of the Year at the local neighborhood BBQ's.

My Twitter ban was also noted by many of my local peers.

Accepting our children's independence as they traverse the driving years can be tough. They want to do just about anything but spend time with us. Answering our questions is torture. Getting back to our text messages gets lost in Snapchat and Instagram mania.

It can feel like we are being dumped.

When I was in the depths of pending empty nest despair, a trusted friend told me something that helped.

"Why do you think they are so independent?" – Sage

Because they don't need me, they think they know everything and they are petulant little fools" - Hyperbolic Me

"Why do you REALLY think they are pushing you away, in your words" – Sage

"I'm not sure, but it's upsetting me for some reason." – Sad Me

"It's because you have done a good job with them. They know who they are. They know that they are loved and now they are developing the confidence and strength to start their own journey." – Sage

Grown man crying – Me

Finding creative ways to celebrate their new lives while quietly interjecting our influence is task #1 as you get ready for the kids to launch.



Accepting our kids' independence is accepting that we have parented them well.

Give yourself some grace during this time and recognize that those scary post-curfew nights are them both testing and resting in what you've taught them.

Don't get me wrong – they all go off the rails sometime.

I've questioned whether my daughter was actually possessed by another evil life force when she was in 9th grade. Thankfully, it let her go a few years later.

Anyway, realizing that I'd helped them develop confidence offered me some peace and I hope it will do the same for you.

Finding creative ways to celebrate their new lives while quietly interjecting our influence is task #1 as you get ready for the kids to launch.

Those quiet interjections will be even more appreciated when they are in their freshman dorm on that first weekend and call to tell you they love you.

Step 2: Communication Planning

Prior to my son attending the University of Iowa, we went to a workshop that the school sponsored. They had a number of recent alumni describe their experience and how they were getting along post-graduation.

An engaging young woman discussed her years at Iowa and somewhere along the way, dropped the bomb that she had not called home once in her first two months of school. Her parents drove from New York to find proof of life.

From there she said they developed a regular communication plan (calls every Sunday night).

I have a blended family with two boys and two girls, all within 3 years of each other.

Two are twins.

All of them have behaved differently when it came to "staying in touch."

Hearing about the previously mentioned young ladies disappearing act had me concerned that I would lose touch with my son.



Let's be honest – we are able to keep much better track of our kids via the smart phone revolution than our parents were afforded. Whether it's a text message, FaceTime, etc. we can communicate more frequently.

It may not have much depth, but it can be like a blanket of sorts.

When the kids first leave it's tempting to both assail them with questions and concerns while, at the same time, letting them figure out some things on their own.

This is where a communication plan can diminish your stress. Rather than wondering why they don't return a text message 14 seconds after we send it, they know when we're expecting to hear from them. This doesn't have to be a written contract and I'll encourage you to be flexible.

To that end, they will have breaks and lonely times in their schedule. These can be great times for connection. Let them know you'll check in occasionally via text or email but also that it would be very helpful for YOU if they'd FaceTime with you every Sunday evening before dinner, chapter meetings, study groups, etc.

It was maybe two weeks after my daughter went to school that she called me one Saturday.

She said she just wanted to "check in."

Dad smiling broadly

Adapt these plans for each kid. My son wanted to talk when he wanted to talk. My daughter preferred a scheduled time and that worked for us. The twins literally call their Mom within 15 minutes of each other even though they are in completely different locations. It blows our mind and speaks to their unique bond.

Be a little proactive and get some much needed information like "How's the taco bar" and "Is your roommate getting drunk every night". You'll be able to rest knowing they're OK.



Step 3: Pocketbook Intervention

For many families, affluent and otherwise, there is not a free flow of chit-chat about money.

We don't like our kids to know how much money we make, what our mortgage payment is and why we complain when they blow \$100 on Amazon for a drone to spy on their boyfriend.

Perhaps it was how we were raised or societal pressure, but we like to keep the pocketbook hush hush. My wife has had very literal conversations with our kids about sex, horror movies, and death – but the thought of them understanding how our top line and bottom line look – no dice!

“Dad – I had no idea how expensive life was.” – My firstborn the third week of his college freshman year.

Well said my boy! Until kids start spending their “own” money in their “own” way they do not have a great sense of how it works.

This is something we have to help them understand.

In my experience it is not happening in a meaningful way for them in high school. The best way to accomplish this is the weekly allowance and budget.

How they earn their allowance is your call – therefore, how they spend it can also live under your supervision. Letting them know that during the driving years they will be given an allowance that covers any entertainment expense and gas for their car is a great start.

Dave Ramsay's envelope system can be an interesting supplement, i.e. here's \$20 for gas this month and here's \$25/week for anything else you want to do.

When they come back for more, it requires an itemization, etc. Just think of this as a warm up to the bigger expenses pending in college – beer and cool gym clothes.

Once your child has decided on a college, it's a good time to help them build a balance sheet and budget. Most will garner some cash from summer jobs and graduation.

Hopefully they have nothing on the "credit/debt" side of the ledger yet.

We didn't let our kids work their freshman year so that they'd hit the books and develop a routine. Subsequently we built a weekly budget for the first semester and discussed how we'd monitor things. If they are living on campus with a meal plan, they shouldn't have extreme external expenses.

This process helps them develop a good rhythm of learning how to do without and balancing today's wants with tomorrow's necessities.

All of financial planning is deciding about what we want today vs. what we hope for tomorrow.

This sets the kid up to grasp this before they have a career and enter the "unreal world."

If they are taking on student loan debt to pay for school, it's always a good idea to help them calculate what their payment(s) will look like upon graduation.

Explaining how these will work along with their other expenses after school ends might encourage them to find a major that will support the debt.

As we mention in our "Top 5 Secrets to Successful College Planning" guide, education is about getting ready for a career that will support the educated.



Step 4: Be the Boss

I must write this section with a red face because I DID A HORRIBLE JOB being the boss!

One of my larger mistakes in the college planning process was to let the kids, for the most part, decide where they wanted to go.

We did set the expectation that we would provide most of their financial support at a state school. Therefore, if they wanted to pursue a special program, out of state adventure or an upper end private school they would have to borrow for the difference.

From my discussions with college counselors and consultants, it's clear that many kids glamorize certain institutions or "have" to go somewhere because of friends, the location, or just because. (Picture hands on hips!)

There are things that you know that your kids don't know.

There are experiences that you've had that they don't understand and cannot appreciate. Take that ammunition into the college planning process for both the institution and the major they select.

College is a buyer's market and tons of money can be saved by treating the search as unemotionally as possible.

These savings can translate into much more financial freedom for both you and your kid. In addition, the perceived impact of a brand name school or specialized private college is in many cases overstated.

The [Educate to Career website](#) can be really helpful to sort through the noise of graduation rates, etc. but also get a feel for the actual value your child can get from their education.

Much of the information we use to analyze college is derived from 30 years ago. College expenses were a fraction of what they are today and people were able to be gainfully employed with pensions and long careers without an education.

“College must lead to a good job. College planning isn’t just about getting into a good school. Rational college planning doesn’t require writing a big check or borrowing ridiculous amounts of money. In today’s world, college planning means graduating with a degree that leads to a real career.” - Educate to Career

All this to say:

- Be actively engaged in your child’s college search and understand what it will look like for them financially and professionally when they graduate.
- Explain the drag debt will have on their new, independent lifestyle.
- Do what I didn’t – tell a kid “no” if you’re paying and you know there’s a better alternative.

My son would have been much better suited to attend a two year community college, transfer his credits and finish at a four year state school. It would have saved us tens of thousands of dollars and his GPA and subsequent job prospects would have improved immensely.

Things turned out fine, but there are lessons learned that we applied with the other three kids to everyone’s benefit.



Step 5: Make Your Move

Do you have friends today that are empty nesters?

Have you thought much about what it's going to be like on Friday night when you do not know what your precious one is doing?

Ever wonder what you'll do with your time?

Folks – being an empty nester kicks butt!

I love my kids and enjoy them so much now as young adults. They made my life so much better and I can't imagine how I would have shared love and experience without being a father of two and stepfather of two.

That being said – I've never felt more alive than I have with them on their journey and my wife and I on ours!

When the initial shocks and changes are behind you, one begins to ask the very wise question...

What do I want to do with my (new) life?

Here are a few options:

Move – Find a house you love that's the size you now need. Yes, the kids will come home, but pick the place for you and your new, smaller family. We moved to a home where I don't have another house directly in my back yard. The serenity I've found having coffee on my back deck is difficult to put into words.

Make New Friends – We met a lot of people the later years of our kids high school years and found partners in crime. This new circle is sharing your anxiety and that new found sense of freedom. Be brave and invite new people into your life.

Travel – They don't have to come on all the trips. You know what I'm saying.

Time With Self – Take time to understand your life, your dreams and your baggage. I went through a self-discovery, spiritual exploration program and ended up writing out a new life's journey. After my first kid graduated from college I launched my own business. That self-exploration taught me things about myself that I'd missed. Living with regrets was not going to work.

Engage With Your Partner – Many partners end up looking at each other when they drop the kids off with a sense of apprehension. What do we have without these kids? This can be a great time to reconnect and find out new things about each other. My wife and I have become much closer and communicate freely without the constant buffer of the kids. We also learned how to give each other more space which also brought us closer.

Get Your Financial House in Order – Retirement, savings, investing, wills, social security, taxes, starting a side gig all need your attention. We can help!

Becoming an empty nester is a thrilling experience. This time of transition will likely make you ask yourself new questions and seek new answers. Congratulations, that's the most exciting part of your new adventure.

PrairieFire exists to help people working on and in an empty nest to find more meaning and get that proverbial house in order to live a life of abundance.



Freedom Planning™

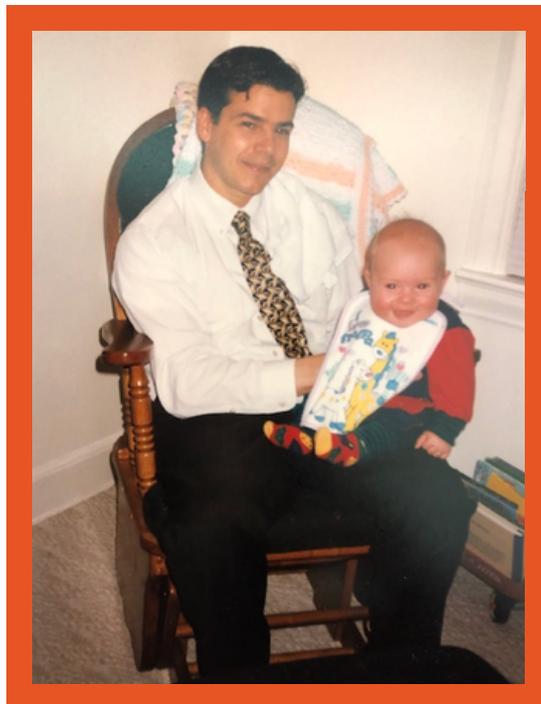
PrairieFire specializes in Life-Centered Planning™ for empty nesters and their families.

We start with our Customized College Planning Program (CCPP) to get your kids on their way and then move into what your life will look as empty nesters.

We use software and assessment tools to help you live your best life.

- You can determine your values with our Return on Life Index Index.
- You can understand your money perspectives with our fiscalosophy assessment.
- And last but not least you can prepare your Financial Lifeline and track it using our \$Lifeline software.

Nobody on their deathbed wishes they'd made different choices with their investment portfolios, but many wish they'd made better life decisions. That's where PrairieFire can help.



A Sneak Peek at PrairieFire's Financial Planning Software

College Planning

Anna Smarts Base Case	\$41,000 First Year Federal FFC	\$40,000 First Year Institutional FFC	\$40,000 First Year Consensus FFC	\$16,400 First Year College Pre-Approval™
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Anna Smarts

Starting in 2021
Communication and Journalism

GPA	3.500
SAT	0
ACT	25

Anna's Schools

School	Cost of Attendance	Est 1st Year Net Cost
Arizona State University at the Downtown Phoenix campus	\$49,436	\$49,436
Grand View University	\$43,238	\$31,701
Iowa State University of Science and Technology	\$37,167	\$37,167
... and 3 more schools		

Reports

- Facts
- One Year Cost
- Four Year Cost
- All Four Years Cost
- Schools Report
- Awards
- How-to-Pay

Applications

School	Applying	Deadline
Arizona State University at the Downtown Phoenix campus	Regular Decision	
Grand View University	Regular Decision	
The University of Iowa	Regular Decision	
... and 1 more application		

Awards

Accepted By	Cost of Attendance	Remaining Cost
Arizona State University at the Downtown Phoenix campus	\$49,436	
Grand View University	\$43,238	

How-to-Pay

School	Funding Gap
Arizona State University at the Downtown Phoenix campus	\$141,221
Grand View University	\$46,267
Iowa State University of Science and Technology	\$89,892
... and 3 more schools	

Borrowing

Borrowing for college is a last resort but can be done strategically. If borrowing is necessary, start with maximizing the Federal Student Loan. Beyond that there are several options to compare – Federal, State, and Private. Use [this link](#) to compare Private Student Loan Rates.



Base Facts

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ ⑥ ⑦

Matt Smarts
Married
Norwalk, IA
AGI:

"What If" Cases

Name	Last Updated
* Base	Jan 21
New "what if"...	

Siblings

- Natalie Smarts Starting in 2023
- Conner Smarts Starting in 2023

Documents

Your document vault is empty

A Sneak Peek at PrairieFire's Financial Planning Software

Return on Life Index



Making Progress

Your ROL index indicates that you are making good progress in your life and that a few areas could benefit from further emphasis.

Your top two areas of highest ROL are **Purpose, Work** and your lowest two ROL rankings were in **Health, Autonomy**.

Leisure 45

Health 30

Relationships 50

Work 60

Residence 55

Achievement 55

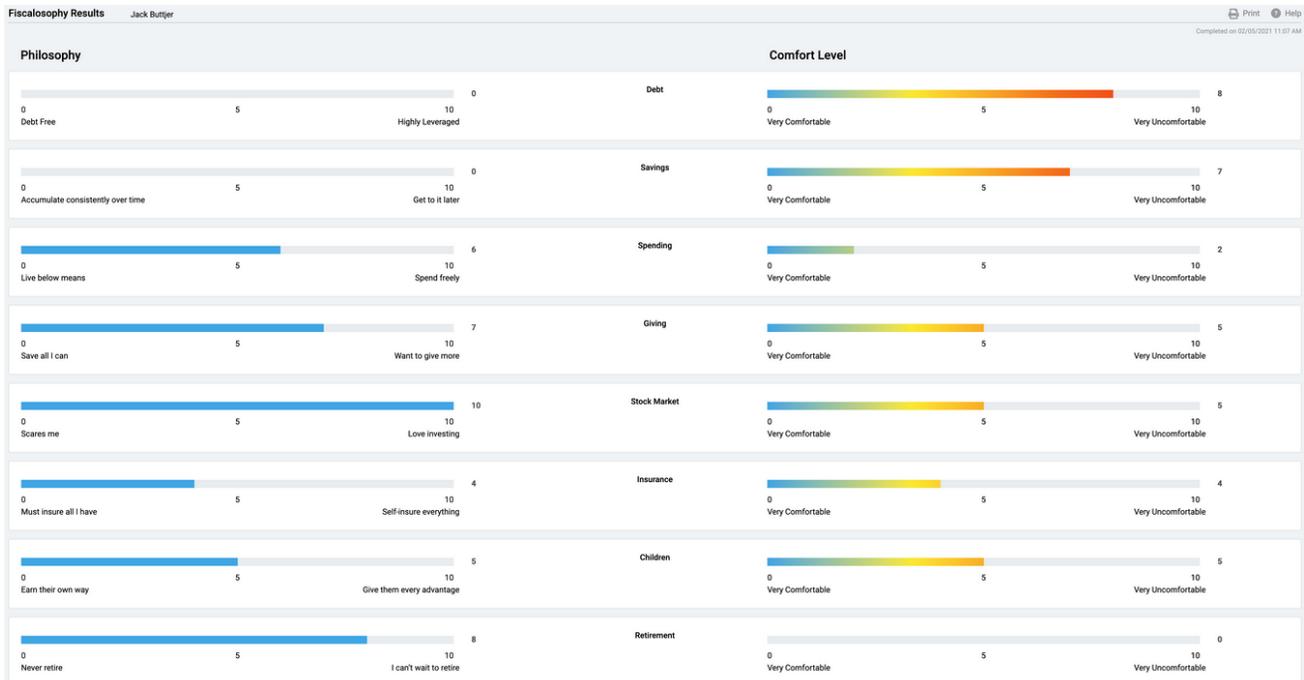
Learning 55

Purpose 65

Autonomy 35

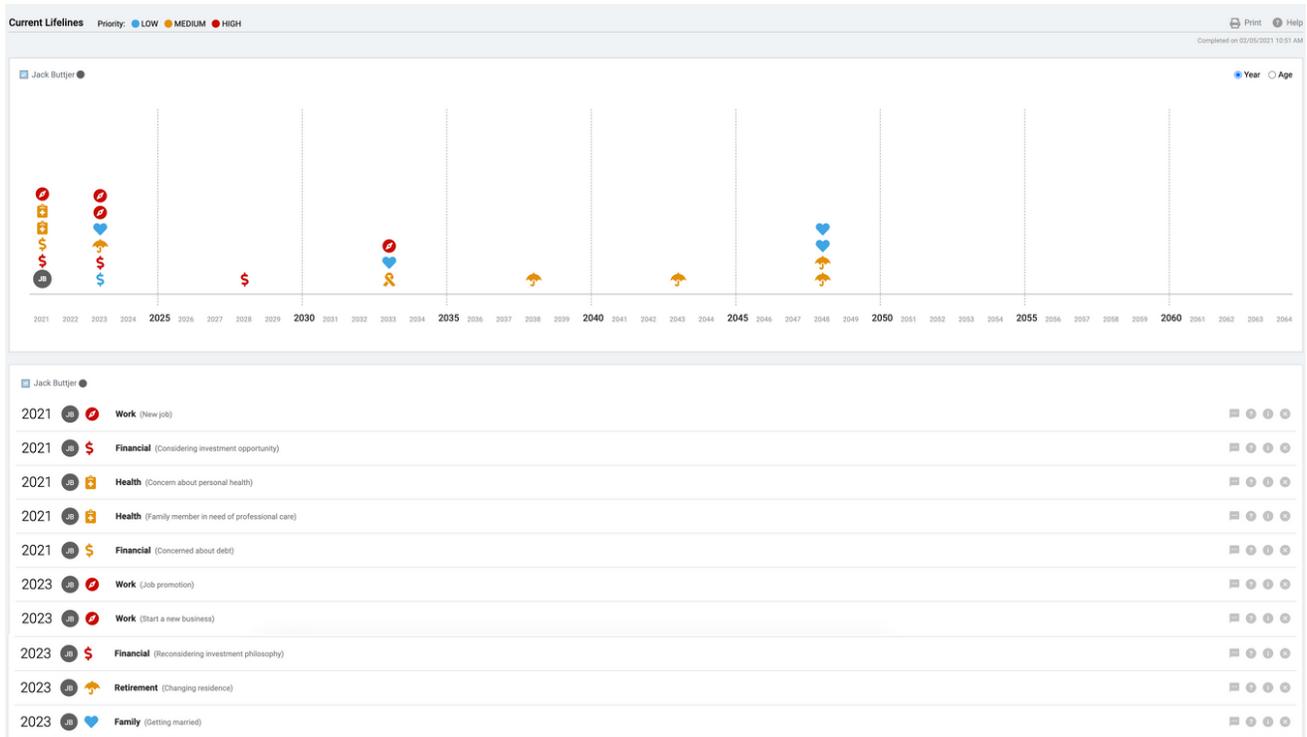
Security 50

Fiscalosophy Assessment



A Sneak Peek at PrairieFire's Financial Planning Software

\$Lifeline



Interested?

If you are interested, please use the link below to schedule a call with PrairieFire's Founder and CEO, Matt Meline, CFP®.

[Click Here to Schedule a Call](#)

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WEALTH  PLANNING

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