

TEN TIPS

for Parents of Young Adults

By Wendy Ulrich
Licensed Psychologist

When my husband and I helped our children move into college dorms or enter the missionary training center, we felt a combination of sadness and liberation to think that they—and we—were finally “done.” We soon realized, however, that along with gaining new competence and freedom, our children faced additional challenges. While our actual control over their lives evaporated, their need for support—a different kind of support—actually increased.

TODAY'S CHALLENGES

Here are some of the challenges young adults face in today's world, along with questions those challenges generate for parents.



LONGER SINGLE LIFE.

Societal trends of starting families later in life can leave some young adults feeling like perpetual adolescents. Others stress out, wondering if they will ever marry or have children. As parents, how can we best help them have an eternal perspective?



FINANCIAL UNCER-

TAINTY. Many of today's young adults may not match their parents economically. They may find it difficult to obtain a job—even with a college degree—or to provide for a family. As parents, should we pitch in economically, or should we assume our children will grow from figuring out their own finances?





OVERWHELMING

OPTIONS. Today's young adults may have a greater variety of career choices. But sometimes all those choices can seem overwhelming. How can parents help adult children explore options but also decide on a satisfying career?

Despite the challenges of today's world, parents can continue to bless their young adult children by providing righteous support and guidance.

LIVING WITH PARENTS.

Whether or not they marry, a growing number of young adults between ages 18 and 34 are living with parents. When adult children live with their parents, how should parents properly negotiate matters such as who pays for groceries and how to discipline grandchildren?



RELIGIOUS AFFILIA-

TION. Today, young adults of all faiths are less likely to affiliate with a church than they were just one generation ago. How can we as parents encourage our adult children to remain active in the Church? How can we spiritually support them even if they opt out of Church activity?

GUIDELINES FOR PARENTS

Even as our adult children may surpass us in some ability or accomplishment, they still need and deserve parental support to navigate the world. Following are 10 guidelines to consider.

1. FIND OUT WHAT YOUR CHILDREN WANT AND LOVE. Instead of telling your young adult children how to get what *you* think they need, ask about *their* values, goals, and dreams. They may ask you to help them map out a path to get there. If they do, let *their* dreams guide your conversations. Explore pros and cons, pray for guidance, and keep talking. If they don't know what they want, encourage them to meet with a guidance counselor, take vocational interest tests, or get more experience through work and volunteering.

2. PRAYERFULLY STUDY DOCTRINE AND COVENANTS 121:34-46. These verses apply beautifully to mothers and fathers. They teach correct principles about how to provide righteous guidance to our adult children.

3. INVEST IN RELATIONSHIPS WITH MANY YOUNG ADULTS. You may find that other people's children are also interested in how you navigated your

20s and 30s. Young adults are curious about how older adults balanced competing priorities, chose careers, or knew when they had found their spouse. When you interact with these young adults, you will understand more about the challenges their generation faces.

4. POINT OUT THEIR GIFTS. Helping young adults discover their talents and interests can help them imagine a satisfying future. Point out that people seldom enjoy anything until they invest enough effort to be competent. Even those with a lot of raw talent must spend time developing it in order to succeed.



5. TRUST THEM WITH THEIR DECISIONS.

This doesn't mean believing that they will always make perfect choices. It means trusting that they can be resilient, that God is forgiving, and that life can be deeply meaningful even when it includes overcoming failure or enduring trials. Young *children* can be scarred by trauma, but young *adults* grow from overcoming obstacles rather than avoiding them. Provide emotional and practical support, encourage breaks from the stress, pray with and for them, and inject a little humor.



6. PRAISE THEM FOR THEIR EFFORTS.

Praising young adults for hard work and resilience helps them stick with tasks longer, take on more challenges, and find more enjoyment in their work. A formula shared by President Thomas S. Monson states, “Work will win when wishy-washy wishing won’t.”¹

7. SEEK FOR INSPIRATION. Our prayers and faith help us open our hearts to let God change us. One woman I know felt concern about the TV shows her adult children let their children watch. She felt the shows modeled disrespect and quarreling, even though they were considered age-appropriate. Not wanting to intrude, she prayed and fasted repeatedly about what to do or say. One morning her daughter-in-law called to ask for advice about how to manage disrespect and quarreling among her children. My friend shared her observation about the TV shows, an influence her daughter-in-law had never noticed. The young parents addressed the issue with their children. Changes were agreed upon, and the atmosphere in the home improved.



8. TALK ABOUT MONEY. With sensitivity to your own situation and the maturity of each child, prayerfully decide what financial help, if any, to give your children. Perhaps they need your help only to create a budget. If you give them financial assistance, be clear from the start if you want the money repaid or used in a certain way. Then cheerfully give them



the responsibility to manage their funds and learn from mistakes, including doing without tomorrow if they overspend today.

9. BE HUMBLE. When you feel inclined to berate yourself for parenting mistakes, try to deepen your humility instead of your humiliation. Apologize gracefully, say what you’ll do to improve, and then move forward with confidence. Let your children conclude from observing you that mistakes are not the end, apologies are not a sign of weakness, and forgiving others and ourselves brings peace.

10. MEASURE TRUE SUCCESS. When we focus too much on how others will judge us for our children’s choices (either for good or bad), we lose objectivity, and we often lose the Spirit. Remember that our success as parents is not defined by how well our children live our values but by how consistently and selflessly *we* live them.

As we prayerfully consider the needs and personalities of each of our young adult children, the Spirit can help us guide without criticizing, support without suffocating, and step back without abandoning. As we do so, our young adult children will come to trust that both we and the Lord are on their side. ■

The author lives in Utah, USA.

NOTE

1. Thomas S. Monson, “Great Expectations” (Church Educational System fireside for young adults, Jan. 11, 2009), 6, speeches.byu.edu.