



A **YOUNG** man works from his laptop in his bedroom of his mother's home in France. Changing economic times have forced many young people to return to live with their parents. (Illustrative: Reuters)

When grown-up children come back to roost

• **BATYA L. LUDMAN**

Dear Dr. Batya,

We made aliya 20 years ago with young children. Our 27-year-old "child" recently mentioned returning home to live "for now." Our last child moved out a few years ago, and though our children come to visit for Shabbat, they've been living on their own for a while. My husband and I have made our own life together again and enjoy the empty nest. We suspect that "for now" might not be a short time, and we want what is best for everyone. How can we help make this happen? S.C.

Dear S.C.,

Times have definitely changed! Years ago, you may have gone away to college and only come home for a mid-semester break and a brief summer holiday. Your parents may have expected you to be accountable for your time and behavior, kept you under scrutiny for the way your room looked, the friends you had and even what you ate, and just when you'd had enough, you went back to school and were out of the house again. Eventually you may have gotten married or found your own place, but only rarely would you have opted to live at home past your mid-20s.

Today, however, we see a prolonged adolescence, and even if your child has gone away for the army or national service, traveled abroad, or worked before or during college, a large number of young (and not so young) adults are returning home to live short-term (and not so short-term). This boomerang generation knows that with economic difficulties and employment issues, it is tough out there financially. Housing is costly, and moving home offers a way to make it work.

Yet this proposal, which entails extended parenting, arrives as you've begun to enjoy your newfound freedom, an empty nest, greater privacy, and not having to prepare daily meals or clean up after others.

While neither parent nor grown-up child wants set rules or thinks they need a formal contract to live together again, discussing what is and isn't acceptable is essential. After all, when your child left home, he was

still your "baby," and in many ways you felt responsible. He's no longer that same child. He has experienced living an independent existence, not being accountable to anyone, getting up and going to bed at odd hours, eating whenever and whatever, and maintaining his living space as he wishes.

Returning to the roost can be wonderful, yet stressful, so how you negotiate this transition will affect your relationship. Planning ahead is essential to make the return a smooth one. Here are some thoughts:

Examine the reasons for returning home. Be clear as to why and whether this is a good choice. If it is, how can you support it without encouraging a prolonged dependency? If having your child move back will hurt his growth and ultimate independence, you both may seriously need to rethink things before setting the situation up for failure.

Establish clear goals. How long is the expected stay, and what will be accomplished? What are the long-term goals, and what are the short-term plans and time line for achieving them? How can progress be evaluated along the way?

Discuss expectations and responsibilities. What are each person's expectations? Writing this down, while seemingly tedious, can help focus you and clarify any concerns from the outset, preventing resentment later on. How will you deal with meals and laundry, chores, shopping, car usage, and "rent," for example?

Determine house rules. Discuss privacy, entertaining, and ways that you can all live comfortably and respectfully together as mature adults in the same space. Encourage open communication as a way to avoid misunderstandings and to let others know your plans.

Listen to your child. Try to be there for your child and understand things from his perspective. Enjoy his enthusiasm, and be proud of him. Be supportive and encouraging without nagging. Your job is to make your child feel good about being at home and yet view this as, at best, a temporary stepping stone to achieving independence.

Encourage responsible adulthood and independence skills. When your child was young, you did things for him. As he matured, you did things togeth-

er, and with time, you stepped back and watched him do things on his own. You know that the more you do for him, the less he'll do for himself. While wanting to be helpful and to guide your children, your job now is that of mentor or consultant, and only when asked. Be there to help, but don't take over, be overbearing or encourage helpless behavior. You want your child to be an independent thinker, make his own decisions, and learn from both his successes and failures.

Discuss finances. Helping a child become fiscally responsible through learning how to save and spend (including giving charity) starts ideally when youngsters earn or are given a monetary gift. By now, you've ideally had many discussions about finances. Life is harder in many ways than when you were young, but you nevertheless want your child to be self-supporting. Does everyone have realistic expectations? Will your child be working? Saving money? How do his needs and wants mesh? What can he afford, and what can you realistically offer, while still saving for your retirement and for your other children? If he's working, how can you best help him to learn to budget, pay bills on time and save? How does he deal with living expenses, tuition, books, transportation and other costs? While being supportive, you can't do it for him. He'll let you know if he wants your input, and you can direct him to outside financial and professional advisers as well.

No matter how you feel about your child's return home, you'll all have to evaluate whether the move is right for everyone. This new stage of life creates a whole new set of dynamics and expectations, requiring everyone to work together to make it work. You might just see and appreciate a whole new side of your child – now grown up and getting ready to leave your roost for good. ■

The writer is a licensed clinical psychologist in private practice in Ra'anana, and author of the book *Life's Journey: Exploring Relationships – Resolving Conflicts*. She has written about psychology in *The Jerusalem Post* since 2000.

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