

# How to help reluctant fledgling leave nest

Son John will be 22 next month, and he's still living with his parents. His older brother and sister have been gone for years. Both left the nest before they reached 18. But then there's John. He always was the baby, probably over-protected, too. And now he's the straggler, the last bird to leave the nest, an embarrassment to his parents and to himself.

"What's taking him so long?" his parents ask themselves. Have they failed in some way? Is their son lazy or emotionally crippled? What will everyone think of them? They blame John. They blame themselves. And they panic.

Then they try things, strategies that are aimed at putting pressure on their son. Lectures and verbal harassment are attempted, but they just cause alienation. They try kicking him out of the house, until he loses his job and

can't pay his rent. Then he moves back home.

The list of strategies goes on. Parents of stragglers seem to go through the same methods and experience the same frustrations. Nothing seems to work.

You can get him a job with his uncle, but he gets sick. He is chronically late, and he really doesn't like the work. You can send him to a psychotherapist, you can send him to college, you can send him to the Marines. But all of these take a lot of time, and still may send him home unmatured. Or you can just wait patiently and count on the natural maturational process to finally occur.

ALL OF THESE methods are doomed to fail because they all share the same essential misconception: the belief that the straggler is naturally

inclined to stay in the nest as long as he can because of a flaw in his personal development. It's the belief that wanting to grow up, to be self-sufficient, is a product of good upbringing and healthy personal maturity.

So straggling is seen as a sign of weak or under-developed character. Reluctance to leave the nest is seen as laziness, an unwillingness to leave a "good thing." And the logical cure is to force the immature bird to fly by pushing him over the edge.

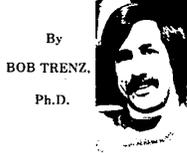
Fortunately, this goes against the grain of most parents. And it rarely works, anyway. Which is easy to understand when you realize that the main reason for the straggler's slow emancipation is his lack of preparedness for adult life.

So, kicking him out of the nest before he learns to fly can lead to disastrous failures.

**BUT WHAT ELSE** can you do? The answer is to join forces with the fledgling adult. Instead of trying to coerce him, form a team with him. Instead of trying to manipulate him, design a plan of action that includes his ideas and needs.

Of course, to the parent who believes that his young adult son or daughter is basically lazy and unwilling to grow up, this must seem like unrealistic advice. But, basically, what I'm saying is to treat your straggler as an adult rather than as a child.

Instead of assuming that he is motivated to resist adulthood, you have to realize that he wants to grow up even more than you want it for him. We all are naturally inclined to achieve the next step in our maturation. An infant can hardly wait to walk and talk. And a teenager aches to be successfully in charge of his own life.



By **BOB TRENEZ**, Ph.D.

confidence and competence rather than tearing them down with coercive and deceptive methods.

Nothing builds confidence like success. So the key is to help your young adult demonstrate that he can effectively deal with the requirements of adulthood.

The same principles apply here as at any other stage of development. The challenges he faces should be within his current capabilities. You wouldn't start a 4-year-old on a two-wheeled bike; at least not without training wheels. So, with a young adult, you might plan ways of living away from home that are not as overwhelming as a fully independent adult situation might be.

Bob Trenez is a psychologist and marriage counselor in Rochester. Comments for Dr. Trenez may be sent to P.O. Box 64, Rochester 47603.

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