



When Our Grown Kids Disappoint Us: Letting Go of Their Problems, Loving Them Anyway, and Getting on with Our Lives

Jane Adams

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How do today's parents cope when the dreams we had for our children clash with reality? What can we do for our twenty- and even thirty-somethings who can't seem to grow up? How can we help our depressed, dependent, or addicted adult children, the ones who can't get their lives started, who are just marking time or even doing it? What's the right strategy when our smart, capable "adulthoods" won't leave home or come boomeranging back? Who can we turn to when the kids aren't all right and we, their parents, are frightened, frustrated, resentful, embarrassed, and especially, disappointed?

In this groundbreaking book, a social psychologist who's been chronicling the lives of American families for over two decades confronts our deepest concerns, including our silence and self-imposed sense of isolation, when our grown kids have failed to thrive. She listens to a generation that "did everything right" and expected its children to grow into happy, healthy, successful adults. But they haven't, at least, not yet—and meanwhile, we're letting their problems threaten our health, marriages, security, freedom, careers or retirement, and other family relationships.

With warmth, empathy, and perspective, Dr. Adams offers a positive, life-affirming message to parents who are still trying to "fix" their adult children—Stop! She shows us how to separate from their problems without separating from them, and how to be a positive force in their lives while getting on with our own. As we navigate this critical passage in our second adulthood and their first, the bestselling author of *I'm Still Your Mother* reminds us that the pleasures and possibilities of postparenthood should not depend on how our kids turn out, but on how we do!

When Our Grown Kids Disappoint Us: Letting Go of Their Problems, Loving Them Anyway, and Getting on with Our Lives Details

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From Reader Review When Our Grown Kids Disappoint Us: Letting Go of Their Problems, Loving Them Anyway, and Getting on with Our Lives for online ebook

Matt says

This is my mom's favorite book.

Jeremy says

Quotes:

Wanting our kids to be personally fulfilled is a goal unique to our generation. Having gone to sometimes extraordinary lengths to ensure it, it's no surprise that our kids grow up expecting us to provide it and give up the responsibility for finding it themselves, in the places that truly adult people discover it: in the satisfaction of work, love, connection, commitment, self-sufficiency, and achievement.

We cannot make our grown kids happy. As long as we expect that we can, they will, too. And we will both be disappointed.

Some of our kids think marriage might be a shortcut to maturity, as if a ring and a license and monogrammed towels automatically confer adulthood.

“If I'd known being a parent was going to last this long, I might not have done it.” Tim

That may be our own addiction: the refusal to believe, despite all the evidence to the contrary, that we cannot fix them, that they have to fix themselves, that the only problems we can fix are those that belong to us.

Taking over control of their out-of-control lives takes away the responsibility to solve their problems that rightfully belongs to them and puts it, instead, on us.

“It was their actions, not yours, that led them to this place; you are not responsible. Assume you did your best and stop blaming yourself for not being good enough to prevent whatever happened.” Nan

Sociologist Jo Brans and Margaret Taylor Smith identified six stages in the coping process: shock, attention, detachment, autonomy, and connection.

Our most important task, as parents and as people with lives of our own, is to separate from their problems without separating from them.

Many of us turn to therapists to hear, validate, and contain our feelings. We do it because we're a therapy generation in a therapy culture, and because we may be more comfortable paying for emotional support than asking for it from other people.

Although we can find neither purpose nor meaning in what has happened to our kids, we can find both in our

response to it.

“The task of experimenting and provoking social change and new social forms is generally assigned to the young, [but] the task of maintaining social continuity – the constant beat of the social heart – is generally assigned to the elders.” Dr. David Gutmann

Tina says

This book helped me so much. I love the eye opening concept of detachment from my grown kids problems. I highlighted lots of stuff in this book. I keep going back over those pages.

Rebecca says

It is their story and they are sticking to it. Putting all the blame on the child did not seem to be the way to go. Leaving a little hope for resolving relationships was shorter then I would have liked.

Jay says

Although I was never a Boy Scout, I appreciate their motto “Always be prepared”. In that vein, I read “When our Grown Kids Disappoint Us”, which covers just what the title says. The grown kids the book talks about range roughly from 21 to their 30s (and my kids are a few years shy of this range, hence the preparation). What those kids have done to disappoint are illustrated in a number of stories, including joining cults, getting pregnant wantonly, becoming sex workers, addictions of all kinds, prison, theft from family, and the like. Strangely, nothing about kids becoming politicians. The book begins with what I suspect is the most common disappointment, adult kids moving back home. The book goes into history and looks at that problem from a lot of angles, including the obvious extended-family-under-one-roof way to live our ancestors found normal. The authors tell these true-life stories, and you can commiserate with the parents in the book. The same thing happens with the other disappointments, you can feel miserable for them but you also see that, at least in the stories, the parents can’t change their adult children, and the attempts make them upset. You also see there’s always hope. The subtitle of this could be “Disregard the Barn Door, That Horse has Bolted”. Great for commiserating, and getting a glimpse at what other parents have put up with.

Go2therock says

I didn't necessarily find the disappointments I've experienced with my own children, but the words of strong encouragement were beautifully shared. Jane Adams managed to not condemn anyone for their choices, but in a way that felt like firm hands upon your shoulders and a straight look in your eyes that called and urged us as parents toward better mental health with loving boundaries, for our sakes and for our kids. Well done.

The later chapter (second to the end?) was my favorite. Less about the kids, and more about the parents.

Maggie says

totally worth reading, imo. i needed to know that what i was experiencing is/was not abnormal. it's normal: we were never in control of our children (young or matured to adulthood); we were in command ... for a brief period. but then they developed into their own person and our job now is not to fix anything yet to respect and (continue) to love them, forever. i reached a point where i could no longer figure out if i was being supportive or enabling. so now i've drawn the line in the proverbial sand and turned them loose from my fix-it desires and abilities and they are welcome to visit me any time. i love seeing them. but no more solutions for problems i did not cause. which is not to say i don't have regrets b/c i do. and i regret my errors. but if i lived beyond the errors that my parents inflicted upon me, they can too. i wish them strength and success.

in gerald durrell's book-made-into-film *my family and other animals* the mother of this herd (i so identified!) said, "if you are in control of your family, something has gone wrong somewhere." amen!

b/c of this jane adams book, i have confirmation of what i did and what i need to do now-and-next and i also have two new terms that makes succinct what i have long understood: phantom blame and phantom guilt. i couldn't change their minds when they were in growth process; i wouldn't have made the choices they have (sometimes) made; and so i am neither to blame nor guilty for where they have gotten themselves.

we are not them; they are not us; there truly is a separation in our personhood; to let them stand and be responsible for their own decisions frees us of wrongly grasped burdens but guess what?! it also frees them to stand alone and stop trying to please us ... what a great relief that must be for them. and isn't that one of the principal gifts our parents gave to us when it *seemed* that they left us too much on our own when we needed help the most?!

i retain the utmost confidence in them; and just as i have learned from my adult mistakes (allowed for by my own parents) so they will/are learning from their mistakes. the benefit for all of us is that they too will grow in wisdom, strength, and peace. which is what i have always wanted for them anyway.

i can recommend this book for those who need a healthy reminder that we truly have done our best; it wasn't good enough; but we can believe in our adult children to become who they need to be. ohyes.

Sarah says

This book had some interesting anecdotes but very little in the way of logistical help. There were no specifics on exactly what you should DO if your child is in jail, but instead psychobabble on how you should FEEL about it.

Denise says

My biggest problem with this book is that it's too short and pretty much sums up what everyone has been telling me for years. As a parent I didn't want my daughter to suffer the same way that I did (coming from a dysfunctional home and scrabbling for money all my life). But I've created a young adult who can't make a job decision without clearing it with Mom first. And yes, I have told her repeatedly that such decisions are HER decision. They aren't mine to make. But she's terrified of being "alone" in the world and having to make adult decisions. So now what do I do? As for money, too much of OUR money has gone to pay HER

bills. She has 3 children and I've used the excuse that I don't want the kids to suffer but now I feel like I'm being held hostage by my own choices. I offer to give her money...many times she hasn't asked but I've offered to "clear the path" so to speak and make things easier on her. This book DID force me to see what I've created and so the rest of my life will be one of letting her fall down and learn life's "lessons". Pray for me, folks...this will get very rough.

Elizabeth Good says

The resounding, repetitive message throughout this book is "to learn how to let go" of our troubled children's problems without letting go of them. All of this and get on with whatever life we (who can no longer call ourselves parents) have left on this earth. This is great advice, but extremely difficult to accomplish on so many complicated levels that were not truly addressed in this book. There was something missing in this book, and I cannot quite put my finger on it. Perhaps it was too short, too vague with the exception of a few example situations, and it just skimmed the surface of the problem. I suppose that's why we pay psychologists for one on one sessions.

Nancy Martin says

I found this book very helpful! It covers experiences of parents of the simply aimless to jailed criminals. For every parent who has ever felt guilty, or that somehow their adult child's failure to thrive according to societal or even moral norms, this book is a psychological balm.

Basically, Adam's advice is that we recognize that we have no control or responsibility for our adult children's decisions & lifestyles. She also makes it clear that we can still have a full & happy life in our post child raising years; ours lives do not need to be "all about them." That is unhealthy, not only for them, but also for us.

I disagree with those reviewers who say Adams doesn't tell "how". Adams makes it very clear that detachment & logic are the keys to moving on with our own lives. She also advocates non-interference and boundaries. I venture to say that if you can not understand "how" to detach and set boundaries, you are most likely too emotionally and financially enmeshed & ensnared by your children's issues to act in a healthy & logical manner.

I had already intuited the necessary steps for acceptance of both myself and my child, so much of the information was not new. However, I did particularly like the final chapters, which focus on "the 2nd half" of a parent's "adulthood." They provided much appreciated insight for me, in a world where most adults of my age (mid fifties) seems to be held hostage by the demands of adult children and care of grandchildren. They are not us! They have their own lives to live, as do we!

Judith K. says

Good book. Be careful about leaving this one out on the coffee table!

Kate says

"Parenthood is one long exercise in relinquishing control, or the illusion that we ever had it. Post parenthood is about acceptance. While acceptance may seem like passivity, it is anything but, since it liberates us to create our second adulthood in our own way, with nothing holding us back."

This book is helpful for parents who have issues with their adult children...knowing that they are not alone in their challenges, but the reminder that that their are two gifts we give our children: roots & wings. Accepting the floundering while they spread their wings is tough, but it is their life and our role is to allow them to learn from their experiences and not feel the guilt of being able to solve their problems for them. Sometimes it is necessary to reshuffle the deck of cards when it doesn't present itself the way we expected our wished it to be.

Nancy says

When I read such self-help books, I am routinely disappointed. No one really addresses MY issue and/or tells me exactly what to do about it. As with this book, the anecdotal stories make me feel better and as if my problems are not that bad. And I generally do take something of value from the books.

"Parents who are adept at promoting their kids' independence share certain characteristics: They're able to satisfy their own needs as well as their children's, and they have a clear sense of their own values, especially the value of autonomy, for themselves as well as their kids." (105)

"Forgiving our kids their trespasses against our values, our hopes, our assumptions and expectations is a gift we give ourselves, not them. Forgiveness allows us to let go and move on after grieving not only the loss of our dreams for them but also those we had for ourselves. And that is a task that falls to us in this season of our life regardless of whether our grown kids are exactly who we always hoped they would be or not." (150)

"... six stages of the coping process: shock, attention, action, detachment, autonomy and connection." (151)

"We may feel cheated by their inability to realize their potential, but that job is theirs and the problem is ours." (154)

"Meanwhile, I help her out as much as I can. I don't judge her, I just love her. And I try to do what my minister suggested - let go of my disappointment, dream my own dreams for myself, and let hope be a surprise." (160)

"...but it reminds us how helpful it can be to reframe the problems facing our kids in the context of an entire life, not just a piece of it...Although we can find neither purpose or meaning in what has happened to our kids, we can find both in our response to it." (186)

Marcelle says

I gave this book 5 stars not because it is riveting or superb prose but because it's a wonderful book that lets parents know they are not alone. If you struggle with getting your grown children to get out on their own this book will help you realize you are not alone, you don't have to keep it a secret AND - you need to move on

from them. It tells you why you need to move on and why it is ok not to help your children forever. Its a good book for any parent to read, especially those with kids in high school so they can prepare themselves and start talking with their kids about this.
