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How To Help Your Young Adult Through A Very Tough Time

Without doing all the heavy lifting for them.

By [Melissa T. Shultz](#)



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Twenty-four hours after my oldest son graduated from college — just two weeks shy of the day he was to start a job in the field he’d longed to work in since he was 14 years old — he turned to me and said, “I think I’m having a quarter-life crisis.”

I knew from previous conversations that he was reconsidering his career path, but it had become very apparent very quickly that he was now over-the-top stressed, and looking for some kind of reassurance. Trouble was, we were standing on the street corner outside his apartment and there wasn’t time to talk. His father and I were headed to the airport for our flight back home. So I hugged him and said the second thing I thought of at the moment, the first being Oh sh*t.

"It's normal," I told him. "You're exhausted. Just give it some time."

When our kids are little and face adversity, we help them fix things. As they age, the fixing begins to fall to them. At least, that's the plan. Besides the classic rites of passage — and the challenges unique to each individual — come the intricate issues in each generation. Today's young adults struggle with the high cost of living on their own, the unforgiving scrutiny of social media and, in some cases, because of well-meaning but slightly over-involved parents (often in response to having the opposite type of upbringing), untested problem-solving skills.

My own two kids are no strangers to adversity. From career shifts to dating woes to financial come-to-Jesus moments, they're living it. As it happens, they aren't the only ones gathering life lessons along the way.

Here's what I've gleaned about how to help young adults through setbacks, without doing all the heavy lifting for them:

- It's true — once a mom, always a mom. But there's a big difference between being a mother who's actively parenting a child, and one who's the parent of someone over 18. If you haven't already made the transition, become a listener, not a doer. Resist the urge to fix (RUF).
- Encourage them to talk when they're ready, and remind them that it helps. And by help, again, I don't mean fixing things. You're providing a safe place for them to put their thoughts so they can understand what's happening, and feel validated. For me, it's a lot like the process of writing. Once I put thoughts to paper I still need to read it all out loud to know how to make it better. Talk can do that when facing personal challenges.
- Storytelling is part of our Mom DNA. Remind your son or daughter about a time or two that they survived something they thought they'd never get over, but did. Or better yet, ask them to tell you a story that they recall. This will reassure them that they've done it once and can do it again. Resilience, as it turns out, really is an emotional muscle.
- Emphasize that there's no escaping stress — it happens, and can actually be a motivator. Tell them to use it to draw upon, much like an energy source, and then power forward in a positive way.
- Suggest they take the time to make a list of their strengths. Sometimes they're forgotten when our self-esteem takes a hit. Eye-rolling may ensue, but it really can help. Offer sticky notes — they can blanket their walls with them. It's reassuring.
- Once upon a time there was a world without social media. While it serves a purpose today, it also can make you feel as if you have to compare your life to others' — and that rarely ends well. So encourage them to stick to friends IRL. Especially those who make them laugh.
- Lead by example and show them the importance of setting realistic goals and moving toward

something. Assure them that they'll get there — it may take time, but they have everything they need to figure it out.

After some soul-searching, my son got through his quarter-life crisis. He's still facing life's ups and downs, but he's honing the skill set he needs to triumph over the many kinds of adversity that life can throw at you. And I'm still here to remind him he's strong, worthy, and much loved.

TOPICS PARENTING ADULT CHILDREN



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Melissa T. Shultz is a writer, and the acquisitions editor for Jim Donovan Literary, an agency that represents book authors. She's written about health and parenting for The New York Times, The Washington Post, Newsweek, Readers' Digest, AARP's The Girlfriend, AARP's Disrupt Aging, Next Avenue, NBC's Today.com and many other publications. Her memoir/self-help book From Mom to Me Again: How I Survived My First Empty-Nest Year and Reinvented the Rest of My Life was published by Sourcebooks in 2016 and named one of "3 Inspiring Reads" by Parade.com. Melissa recently co-founded Card Sisters, a new line of greeting cards for women. The tagline is: Women Friends Are Sisters At Heart.

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