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What To Expect When You're Expecting To Stay In Touch With Your Grown Children

Tired of getting those texted replies in screaming caps of the "MOM, I'M FINE!" variety?

By [Melissa T. Shultz](#)



Eva Bee

Have you ever had your heart ripped out and broken into a million tiny pieces? I have — when I said goodbye to both of my sons at college. A little dramatic? Maybe.

When my boys were infants, moms with older children told me wistfully to enjoy every minute with them, because though the days might pass slowly, the years would tick away all too quickly. I was certain that all of these women, even the moms whom I'd considered laid back, were being over-the-top emotional. Turns out, they couldn't have been more spot on.

From their first moments, when we talk and our babies listen, to their later years, when they talk and we listen, we refine our communication skills to meet their changing needs, and ours. When I took my kids to school it became abundantly clear that in the absence of proximity, the one and only thing that would keep us connected moving forward was the desire to do exactly that — keep us connected. And this was uncharted territory.

It's often not until our kids leave home that we begin to understand they don't have us on their minds, as much as we have them on ours, and replying to our messages is far from their first priority. So, we tend to push the limits, sending one too many exasperated texts, which usually inspires a reply in screaming caps of the MOM, I'M FINE! variety.

In my experience — and that goes for other moms I've spoken to — it's best to adjust your communication expectations long before your kids head off to their own lives. This includes the mom who's certain she's great friends with her kids, knows them better than anyone else, and can recite not only what her children like to eat for breakfast, but how many pairs of jeans they own, and the names of their closest friends.

The truth is, this adjustment is not a bad thing — after all, there has to be a shift if they're going to mature. And you'll save yourself a fair amount of anxiety if you let them know that you understand their need for more privacy.

Does that mean all communication stops? Nah. It's just likely to revolve around certain scenarios: a) when their new friends aren't within earshot, b) when they need money or (ironically) they've lost their phone, or c) when they're out walking somewhere and decide to call you spontaneously. In which case, just let them wax on, and don't underestimate the power of humor, or listening without judgment.

Remember: our kids don't do this out of spite — they just know on some level that they need space to figure things out. Because if they share everything in real time, we'll likely try to influence whatever they're thinking and doing. It's second nature for us. And more than ever before, they feel the need to make decisions themselves.

What about calling them? You can, of course, but send an email or text first to schedule a time to catch up. And by "catch up" remember, you may only get the highlights, but that's okay — you're connecting and they're establishing boundaries. Giving them a heads-up indicates that you respect their new life apart from yours.

As for texting in general, avoid lengthy paragraphs — stick to brief questions that mostly require YES or NO answers. Even better, send pictures of the dog or Mr. Whiskers looking adorable so they'll actually look forward to your texts, and want to respond. And don't be afraid to add something about what you're doing that's new and different. You're role-modeling not only the art of communication, but moving forward with life.

Then one day, perhaps when they're regularly employed, you'll (hopefully) find that your children will kick that communication up a notch. Why? Because they want to. Because as I've

learned first-hand, it turns out the space was good for you, too. And surprise of the century, you don’t need to know everything about them in order to have a good relationship.

I recently asked my oldest son, who now tolerates me regularly, if there was a moment in time when something switched — something I did or didn’t do, or said, that made the communication easier. This is how he replied:

“Don’t take this the wrong way, I mean it well. It’s just that you reach a point where you understand your parents and their idiosyncrasies better, and you become less annoyed by them. You’re more accepting, and it’s probably a result of getting older, and meeting more people — you learn how to juggle more personalities. That’s beneficial for you and how you interact with others, including your parents. I mean, you’re my mom and I get that you love me and care about me, and it may be over the top sometimes. But now I understand why.”

Out of the mouths of babes...

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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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