



## DC498: My Son Just Will Not Grow Up, Part 1

(I received the following letter)

“Our twenty-eight-year-old son took a psychological test online or somewhere and now believes that he has Peter Pan syndrome. He talking to someone who deals in “lifestyle management,” and they talk for one hour each week, but I only see this person helping him become even more irresponsible. He lives with us, doesn’t have a job, and does absolutely nothing. My husband and I are nearing retirement age and would like to begin a more relaxed life without taking care of this child. How do we handle this situation?”

The Peter Pan Syndrome is a pop psychology term that was coined back in 1983 and refers to adults who are socially immature. It is usually used by people to refer to themselves when they’re making an excuse to be irresponsible and simultaneously acting like a victim while doing it.

The short and simple version is that your son is using you and enjoying it. And why wouldn’t he? He could be out there in the world, slugging it out and working hard. But that’s hard work. He’d have to take a lot of risk and responsibility on himself. He’d have to be accountable. He’d always have to show up at work. It wouldn’t always be fun. Imagine that. OR he could just sit at home and do nothing, where you’ll feed him and take care of him. That second choice is pretty attractive.

Now, this sounds like an obvious question, but WHY does he make the second choice? Why does he stay home instead of going out into the world and working? The first reason is obvious: It’s EASIER not to work. He’s lazy. The second reason is not as obvious. It’s SAFER. Getting a job is frightening. Before you actually FIND a job, you have to go from place to place and hear—over and over again—from all the OTHER places that you’re not GOOD ENOUGH. When you already don’t feel unconditionally loved—which is true for most of us—that’s pretty tough to hear. It’s almost unbearable. Way safer to stay home.

A third reason he stays home? This is a big one. Because you LET HIM. He wouldn’t be there on the couch eating Cheetos if you didn’t let him.

This brings us to the next obvious question, which is, why do you let him? Because there’s something you get out of this arrangement. You SAY you want to begin a more relaxed lifestyle without him around, but for some reason you either WANT him around, or you’re AFRAID to make him leave, and you have to examine that. I can’t answer this for you, because I don’t know you well enough, but I can give you some options to consider. Many parents ENJOY being indispensable in their children’s lives. They LIKE taking care of their kids. More likely, though, you’re afraid to tell him to leave. You’re afraid he’ll be angry at you, and this is a huge trap for many parents.

It is not your son’s job to like you or love you, and you MUST let go of that. If you require that he become independent—that he go out on his own, for example—and he gets mad, that’s just tough. Then he’ll be mad, but he’ll get over it. All that matters is what’s best for him, and we’ll talk more about that in our next session.