



DC500: My Son Just Will Not Grow Up, Part 3

In our last two sessions we discussed a letter from a mother whose 28-year old son lived at home and was doing little or nothing to find a job or to help out at home. I suggested that he did that because she LET HIM and she was afraid of offending him if she threw him out and made him independent. I also suggested that she realize that she was actually INTERFERING with his happiness by letting him stay there, because he wasn't learning to be responsible, a key component to happiness. Now back to the writer of the letter.

So, after you require that he begin paying rent and doing chores around the house—right now—it's time to prepare him for complete independence. It would be best if you and your husband could do this together. Sit down with him and explain that you made a huge mistake in not preparing him for independence much earlier than this. It was your fault, but you're going to try to make up for it now. Set a clear date by which he will be moved out of the house. It should NOT be too far away, say no more than three months. This gives him time to look for a place to live and find a job. This date must not be flexible. You have to MEAN it.

Then offer him all the help you can to find a place to live and find a job. Tell him that you'd be happy to help him drive around to interviews, or look on the Internet with him, or give him suggestions, or whatever. But you're only OFFERING HELP. Emphasize that. You are not doing this for him or PUSHING him to do anything, which would be just babying him again, which is what you're doing now by feeding and housing him. He doesn't need that. He can ask you for the help he needs. You will only facilitate work that HE is doing. You'll take HIM to interviews. You'll help HIM look things up on the Internet, if he doesn't know how, and so on. You won't do it FOR him. If he chooses to do nothing, let him do nothing.

If he does nothing, a month from the deadline, simply remind him that he has a month left. That's all. Don't nag him in the meantime. At a week before the deadline, remind him that he has a week left. That's all. A father once called me to say that he had done exactly this with his son, but at two days before the deadline, his son asked for an extension, and the father asked me what he should do. I told the father to give the son a list of the homeless shelters in the area and express his faith in his son that he'd be all right. The son had a job and an apartment by the deadline. Yet another father did the same thing, and the son actually DID go to the homeless shelter, and after a week there was finally motivated to get work.

Don't be afraid to do what it takes to teach your son responsibility, because if YOU don't teach him, who will? This lesson is too important to ignore. It's your job to love and teach him, not to continue to treat him like a baby for the rest of his life. Loving and teaching are functions that will serve him well forever, whereas simply feeding him will last only for a few hours. Remember that when he gets angry at you for not giving him what he wants in the moment. You're giving him what he NEEDS, while he's asking you for what he WANTS, which is quite a different thing.

It takes real courage to be a loving parent, and children rarely appreciate what you're doing in the short term. But you're the only one who can do the right thing. Have the courage to do it. It's worth it.