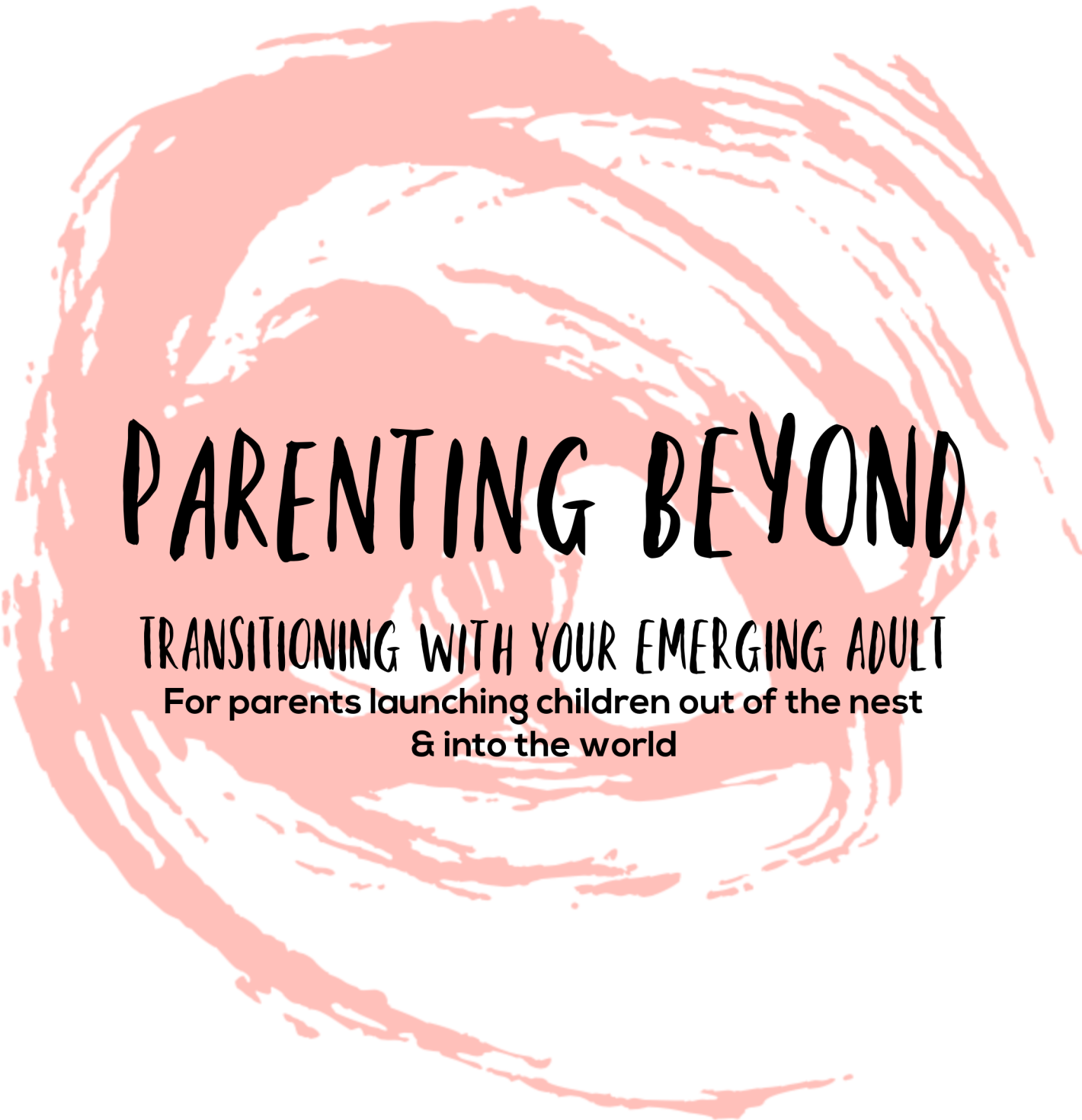




PARENTING BEYOND

TRANSITIONING WITH YOUR EMERGING ADULT

For parents launching children out of the nest
& into the world

KRISTEN HATTON, M.A., LPC



ABOUT THIS E-BOOK

This ebook was designed as a stand alone product before my webinar. It became the spring board to my webinar content and is now intended as a companion piece. The content included here is a good part of what you heard (or will hear) in the webinar. The hope is having this, which includes the counseling tools from the slides + more journaling prompts and activities you can further reflect on as you move through the transition of parenting emerging adults.

I encourage you to print this ebook out to work through. But be sure to also save it as a PDF on your computer in case you want to circle back to it later--maybe after a subsequent kid leaves the nest. I do ask that you please do not share. Rather please direct any friends to my website: <https://www.kristenhatton.com/shop/>

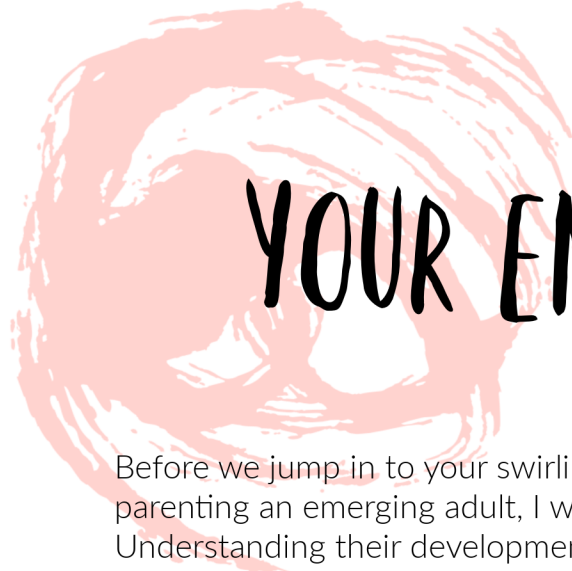
The link to the playback recording of the webinar is here:
<https://youtu.be/-hk-rjp5faA> You will need to copy and paste it into your browser.

Hope this will be a blessing to you!



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YOUR EMERGING ADULT

Before we jump in to your swirling thoughts and feelings over the changes that come with parenting an emerging adult, I want to start with who your child is becoming (stereotypically). Understanding their developmental stage, environment, and fears can help us extend compassion to our child. The hope is as they are emerging, we too evolve in a supportive role as parent/friend, and eventually embrace the changes that come with this new season.

Characteristics of an Emerging Adult

Emerging adulthood is considered the period of development between the late teen years and mid-to-late twenties. Though clearly no longer adolescents, they don't feel like full-fledged adults. And as parents, we don't tend to think of them as adults either—at least until they get further into their twenties. Generally speaking because of the overparenting so common today we also haven't helped them in attaining the same level of maturity that a twenty-year old exemplified a century ago.

At this age emerging adults long for independence and might buck up against anything threatening their autonomy. They are learning to navigate adult responsibilities and want us to trust them. Sometimes they exude confidence and rise to the occasion leading us to see them as trustworthy. But at other times we wonder: "What in the world were they thinking!"

Remember their brains are not fully formed until twenty-five! The last part of the brain to fully develop is the prefrontal cortex, which is the reasoning center responsible for self-control, decision-making, and long-term consequences. This explains then why our "adult" 20-somethings still make impulsive, short-sighted decisions even when they know better or had good intentions. For instance, they want a coveted internship requiring a high GPA, but then blow off a test because they didn't want to miss a night out with friends. Sometimes their desires and actions contradict. Sometimes ours to do!

For better or worse, emerging adulthood is a time of self-focus. On the positive side of self-focus, early adulthood is a stage when they are discovering who they are, exploring new things, investing in their studies, developing new relationships (including potential long-term committed romantic relationships), and preparing for a future career and family. On the not so bright side, with their newfound independence and in environments where everybody is living for themselves, they can easily become so self-absorbed that they fail to consider others' feelings, time, needs, etc.

While emerging adults tend to be optimistic about the future, more young adults today than in past generations experience mental health struggles. Anxiety, stress, fear, and pressure are common. As with teenagers, they look around at their peers and worry they aren't enough. They see others who already feel confident with their major, have a summer internship worked out, or found the person they want to marry. These comparisons can make them feel behind, even though from high school graduation on everyone's path looks a little different.

Contributing factors for the increase in struggles include social media, our culture of perfectionism, a lack of resilience, and over-parenting, among others. If for any reason this stirs up any guilt in you, I want to encourage you that it is never too late—even with our older teens and adult kids—to make parenting changes or repair. Sometimes it simply takes initiating an honest conversation. But also know that though we are our kids' primary shaping influence, they have been shaped by many factors, some outside our control. So rest knowing God is in control and cares for our children even better than we can.

Let's stop to reflect on your emerging adult child and what you've read.

Journaling Prompts

1. Which of these characteristics of emerging adults have you noticed in your child? What else have you noticed about this age or your child specifically?
2. What frustrates you about your child, or this age? What do you delight in?
3. What can you do to help your emerging adult build confidence and resourcefulness? What might you refrain from doing?
4. What conversations might this have spurred you to have or questions to ask your emerging adult?

Therapist Thoughts

Likely there are attributes about your emerging adult child that you either want to change or things you hope to prevent. If you are like me (I've got my mom-hat on here too), my natural default is trying to control, which often comes in the form of nagging. But first-hand experience here, nagging can lead our kids to pull away and spiral down. They want to be autonomous and make decisions for themselves without our constant badgering and we need to let them. This is how they will learn and grow. This doesn't mean we can't help them in certain ways but too often our help is either doing for them or passive aggressively asserting when and how something should be done.

Another repercussion of nagging can lead them to feel like they are failing to measure up to our standards, which can contribute to anxiety and low self-worth. I know this is not our intent; it is hard to take a backseat! But we must empower them so they become capable and confident adults by allowing them to act without our intervention. Instead what they do need from us is our presence, our active listening (paying attention to body language, what is said and not said), and encouragement. Our "adult" kids need this the same way they did when they were little. Coming alongside them in this coach/friend way goes a long way in developing an open, honest and loving relationship with your adult child.

Exercise:

On a separate sheet, either write a letter of encouragement to your emerging adult or make a list of ways you can encourage him/her with your words and actions. Or, do both!

Scripture Speaks:

Take time to reflect on this verse:

"Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear."

- Ephesians 4:29

Prayer:

Pray using what is written below or write/pray your own.

Lord, thank you for my child who is growing into an adult. This is a new exciting time but also challenging. Would you give me your discernment on how to be a parent in this stage? Give me the grace to hold my tongue at times and move toward my child with encouragement and love.



INSIDE YOU

The Struggle is Real

A part of you is excited for your child. You know he/she is ready for the “what’s next.” It is time for a new place, new people, new opportunities. And quite frankly, you are tired. You are tired of hearing comments like, “I’m 18. I’m an adult now.” Or, “Everyone else’s parents let them do XYZ.” The parenting decisions, the conversation, the arguments, it can be exhausting! Not to mention all the things to stay on top of senior year, and the non-stop schedule of events just for this child. In this way, God has a way of making a part of us ready for kids to leave.

At the same time—NO! How can it be time! Your precious son or daughter was just a kindergartner yesterday, right? Plus, you wonder if you’ve taught and told them everything they need to know?! There is another part of you who wants to roll back time. The sadness you feel just thinking about seeing them go, and the anxiety and fear of what this new stage will bring for your child and you can be overwhelming.

For eighteen years or more you’ve devoted much (if not all) of yourself and your time raising your children. You may have stepped away from a career, discontinued hobbies, lost touch with old friends or even drifted apart from your spouse. Parents often divide and conquer, with one parent with one child and another parent with the other(s). Or, one parent does the heavy-lifting with all things kid-centric while the other spouse builds a career. Whatever the case, when a child graduates high school changes occur for everyone in the household. And with any change there is loss of something which is hard! Likely since you are reading this you may be at the beginning point of anticipation of what the future will be like.

Simply naming all our emotions honestly is a helpful first step. Until we do, we sometimes aren’t even aware of what we feel and why. Listed below are some common emotions of parents in your shoes.

Grief	Loneliness	Regret
Sadness	Irritability	Fear
Loss	Anger	Worry
Emptiness	Languishing	Anxiety
Guilt	Withdrawal	Restlessness

Using the bubbles below write in the differing emotions you identify within yourself. You may feel emotions other than those listed. Or you may need more bubbles. If so, just draw them in! Taking inventory helps us grow in self-awareness, see what support and self-care we may need, identify conversations we may need to have with others, and even identify wrong thinking patterns to challenge (more on this to come).

In the space surrounding each bubble (or in a journal) elaborate on each feeling. For example, next to "anxiety" I might write:

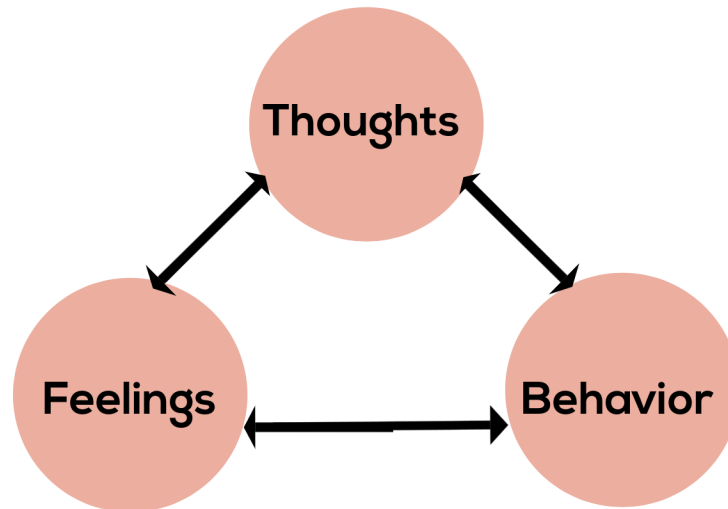
- Daughter finding new friends
- Daughter being safe/making good decisions
- Daughter navigating everything herself, etc etc.

By drawing out the specifics we can better understand and communicate our feelings and then challenge any maladaptive thoughts that come with them.



Therapist Thoughts

If you've done any counseling, you may be familiar with Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT). CBT asserts that our feelings connect with our thoughts and behaviors. As you can see from the diagram, each of the three (feelings, thoughts, and behavior) influence the other and work bidirectionally. It is often our faulty thinking that leads to mental health struggles, such as anxiety or depression, and maladaptive coping strategies/unhelpful behaviors. CBT helps us challenge and replace those thoughts and find better ways of coping.



When working with counselees I regularly have them list their feelings along with the thoughts and/or behavior that go along with them. For example, let's say my son is a high school senior and one of my feelings is sadness. A few thoughts I might have is, "My job is done. The best part of life is over. I don't have daily purpose anymore." To cope with the sadness and hopeless thoughts, I might numb myself by over-drinking, or try to cheer myself up by shopping. When I take the time to be curious and connect the dots between feelings, thoughts and behavior, I grow in awareness and self-compassion. The compassion piece is important—it makes sense that I would want to numb out or cheer myself up from a hard emotion. Rather than beating myself up, I can accept the feeling for what it is. Then with God's help challenge my thoughts and change my behavior.

Challenging our thoughts entails questioning what we are believing true. *Is my job done completely? Do I really not have purpose now? Can life not be full for the empty-nester or partially empty-nester?* Of course, the answer is no! It may feel like truth because I am sad about a life stage ending, but my life can still be full and joyous. It's okay to sit with our sadness; healthy even as I often say, "Don't hurry the hurt." However, there are better ways to cope. For me, moving my body and being outside, even just walking around the block a couple times, does wonders for my mindspace. I also find sitting in my favorite chair with a lit candle and my Bible or other book in hand to be calming. After doing either one of these I'm usually able to think clearer and more prone to turn to the Lord for his comfort and help.

What about you? What helps?

Exercise:

Using the columns below, connect the dots between your feelings from above and the thoughts and/or behaviors that come along.

Feelings	Thoughts	Behaviors

How can you challenge your thoughts? What might actually be true?

Do a little self-care self-evaluation. What things are you doing now to cope? What can you replace or add in to attend to your physical, mental/emotional and spiritual health? Take the time to think about each aspect for we are holistic beings and each part interconnects. I.e: Sleep deprivation or poor nutrition impacts our emotional and spiritual well-being.

Physical

Mental/Emotional

Spiritual

Scripture Speaks:

Take time to reflect on this verse:

"We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."

- 2 Corinthians 10:5

Prayer:

Pray using what is written below or write/pray your own.

Lord, help me to examine my thoughts and see where I am not aligned with truth. Help me to turn from lies and replace them with what is true. And when I am feeling feelings that are hard, would you draw near? Would you give me your comfort and your grace to endure on the hard days and the good days.



YOUR CHANGING ROLE

Underneath Our Parenting

Like our kids straddling between childhood and adulthood, in this in-between we may feel tension in our parenting. Our kid is an "adult" but may still be under our roof or financially dependent on us and therefore we still hold some authority. And yet we aren't responsible for their choices and can't control their behavior. This is especially true when they are away at college or living elsewhere but even in the late teen years we are confronted with how much is outside our control. And yet we still try.

For some of us we need to take a step back in managing and doing for our kids, but out of fear (or habit) we struggle to let go and adapt to our new role as more of a mentor/coach/friend. In my book, *Parenting Ahead*, written primarily for parents before the teen years (but relevant in some ways for all parents), I connected our parenting tendencies, both overparenting and underparenting, to below the surface drivers or ruling desires. As a Christian I identified these to be "idols," which can be anything we hope in to give us what only God can. But even without the labeling of "idol," there is an emotion, motive or desire that drives our parenting tendencies. For instance, if I'm ruled by the "idol" of peace, in my parenting it might show up as me accommodating my kids to keep her happy and everything peaceful. In this sense peace has become what I "worship" or have to have at all cost.

Much like in the previous diagram where we saw how feelings, thoughts and behaviors drive one another, in this case whatever we want most drives our parenting. In addressing this here my hope is to help you discern what those things are for you. For our idols can hinder us from adapting into our role as a parent to a young adult.

Here are some common parenting "idols":

Control	Success
Fear	Safety
Others' Opinions	Happiness
Comfort/peace	

Many of those idols go to together. For instance, if above all I want/need my child to be successful than control and fear will both influence my behavior, and maybe others' opinions too.

Let's play out a situation to see how idols rule: Say I have a high school daughter who must be in the top of her class to get in to top colleges and qualify for certain scholarships. But let's say she is in a high school class with a really hard teacher and makes a C on a test. This not only brings her grade down but hinders her GPA. Rather than letting her talk to the teacher or endure this hard real-life reality, I call the school counselor and demand special accommodations to change the grade. I can't let her dream go down the drain, and what would people think if she didn't get in to the particular school!

Under my decision to call the teacher is the need to control and my fear. Fear of my daughter not getting what she wants, her success, and also others' opinions. So you can see there is a lot going on beneath this action. And though my intent is for my daughter's good, is my intervention actually good for her? I mentioned earlier the lack of resilience and poor coping of many college-aged emerging adults today. Situations like this contribute to the problem. Things have been taken care of for them so they fall apart in adversity.

I KNOW we don't want to see our kids struggle but this is how they learn to be capable adults. As much as you can wean back from interfering while your kids are still at home, the better the training ground for when they are on their own. If you have overstepped or still in the habit of doing so, be honest with your child about where you have done too much and need to correct course. Tell him/her that going forward you want to do things differently. But remember there is no perfect parent and you do not need to live under guilt or condemnation!

We are well-meaning. Only sometimes our best intentions and love for our child get mettled with our fears and lead us to control instead of trusting God with our kids, which I also know is SO very hard!who

Journaling Prompts

What are your thoughts about your current level of involvement? What would your emerging adult say?

What "idols" or over-arching desire/motives are you most prone to? In identifying these, how might you reevaluate to put them in their proper place, or reorient your thinking? For instance, if my daughter didn't get into a top school, I would ask God to help me believe that He is over all things, ruling and reigning, which includes his divine intervening and directing of my daughter's path.

What are some areas you feel (or know) you need to back off on? What steps might you take to do so and/or what makes this hard?

What would it look like to be a parent coach?

Therapist Thoughts

CBT can be a helpful tool to examine our “idols” and parenting tendencies. When I take the time to write down my behaviors (ie; intervening at a level inappropriate for the age of my child) and connect it to my thoughts and feelings (fear of future, etc), I can see more clearly how I was being ruled and tried to take things into my own hands.

Another tool I often use with counselees is the Circle of Control. You will see in the illustration that follows a stick figure inside one circle inside another. The stick figure is you. The circle surrounding “you” represents what you can control. The space between the inner circle and the outer circle represents what you cannot control.

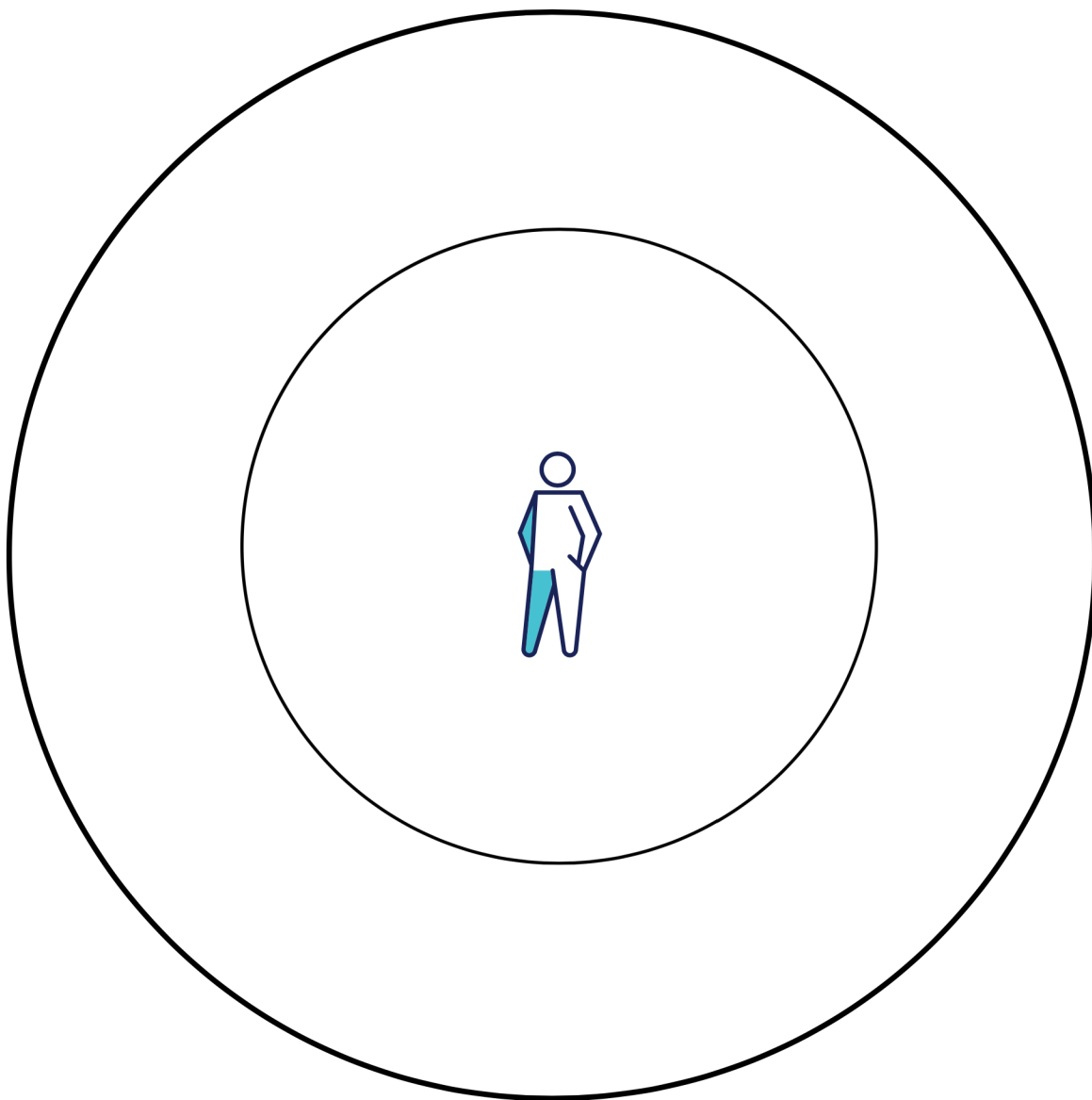
Literally writing into the circle what we can and cannot control in any given situation can help us acknowledge what is outside of our circle. Let's use an example of an emerging adult at college making poor choices. In the inner circle, I might write: pray for him, take care of myself, remind myself of truth, love him, limit funds if it is something related to overspending or spending in ways that infringes on your values (if it is your money). Depending on the situation there may be other things too.

In the outer circle I might write: *his decisions, God at work in his life, his safety, his story.*

This can be hard to see but it reminds me that I cannot be his Savior. I am his parent but he is an adult. Of course, when our adult children are still financially dependent on us there may be boundaries to lay down, or if they live under our roof, household rules that still need to be respected. Overall, the Circle of Control is meant to help us see clearly what we can do and what we can not. And when I personally see so clearly what is not in my circle, it drives me to pray more!

Exercise:

Use the circles below for whatever situation you are experiencing where this reminder would be helpful. Or make your own copy so you can use again and again.



Scripture Speaks:

Take time to reflect on this verse:

"Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."

- Isaiah 41:10

Prayer:

Pray using what is written below or write/pray your own.

Lord, help me to trust you with my emerging adult child and his/her story. When I'm tempted to overstep or over speak, refrain me and remind me that you are God, you love my child and you use all things to grow us in grace.



PURPOSE & JOY

Purposeless?

Purposeless is a lie we can fall prey to when our children no longer need us in the same way. And when one or more child leaves the nest fear can settle into our souls over how we will spend our time. We have thoughts and questions like: *Will I still be relevant? Will my days count? Will I be bored? What will I even do?*

These questions take time, and the journey will look different for everyone. The purpose of this eBook is not to rush you to a place of being okay! Rather I want you to know you are not alone in wrestling through these feelings. But in the here and now I want to hold hope out to you.

A few things that you might consider that have helped me are:

1. Plan something each week, month and/or semester to look forward to--dinner with friends, a concert, or getaway.
2. Be purposeful in connecting with spouse (if married)
3. Initiate time with friends, even cultivate new friends
4. Explore new activities/hobbies and/or volunteer
5. Pursue personal growth/acquiring new skills
6. Set new goals and/or dream

Speaking of dreaming, in my *Parenting Ahead* book I encourage younger parents toward proactive parenting. But we too can be proactive by thinking through our family's next chapter for the good of our relationships and well-being. But an important key is holding loosely to our plans, so they don't become idols and any unmet expectations don't rob us of joy. Rather, we plan and hope with expectation but trusting God with our children and future.

As you think about the years to come, and all that we've talked about, including taking a backseat and what we can't control, I want you to dream about your hopes for your family and also reflect on building adult relationships with child that respects their autonomy.

Use the questions that follow for a springboard to journaling. Some questions may feel like jumping the gun. You have a high school senior as your oldest and now I've gone into a far-off future with grandkids. If this is you, pick and choose the questions that feel most relevant. Or simply journal whatever is on your mind.

Journaling

What do you hope for your children?

What do you hope together to be like?

How do you hope your children relate to each other and you?

How will you be present for your children?

How will you give space?

What are your highest values?

How will you respond when your children have different expectations or views?

What will be things you hope to do together?

If spouses come into the picture, how will you work to ingraft them in well?

How will you seek to support their family unit as preeminent?

What about future grandchildren—how will you handle your role? What might you do that helps or hinders your children in their raising of them

Therapist Thoughts

Research supports journaling as a beneficial coping skill for reducing stress, managing anxiety, processing emotions, growing in self-awareness, clarifying thoughts, finding solutions and building resilience. The same is true for those who keep a gratitude list or journal, research shows reduced stress, and improved physical and mental health. Research also shows these same benefits for those who regularly attend a worship service.

I believe this is worth noting and yet in the hustle and bustle of our days and weeks we don't always prioritize the very things that serve to reorient us. However, I can tell you from personal experience and from counselees I've seen incorporate these practices really do help. Recently I instituted with our family a twist on a gratitude list by starting a shared family album entitled: "Awe Album." I was circumstantially struggling and knew I needed something to shift my mind to God's truth. The premise was on any given day each of our family members would snap a picture of something awe-inspiring—something that caused them to "look up" so to speak. I wasn't sure how it would catch on with my young adult kids but to my surprise everyone participated, not daily but regularly everyone was posting. Not only did this help me look beyond adversity, a side benefit was getting glimpses into the worlds of all my people (my kids are in 3 different states and not any in my state)!

One more idea, you may recall that God provided manna for the Israelites to eat for 40 years. Moses then told Aaron to take a jar and put manna in to keep for future generations (Exodus 16:33). This was to be a testament of God's faithfulness to them so they would see it and remember who God is when they are tempted to doubt.

So I want to ask you—what would you put in your jar? Where have you seen God's faithfulness? Borrowed from an exercise in my Bible study book on Exodus for teenagers, below is a jar in which you can write down events in which you can look back on to remember God's presence. Or, I might suggest as I have to some clients, get a mason jar to keep on the counter and use strips of paper to record God's showing up. When you feel down, when you forget he is near, that he is at work, that he is over all things, take those out to remember. By his grace, may you be filled with gratitude and joy.



Scripture Speaks:

Take time to reflect on this verse:

"Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus"

- 1 Thessalonians 5:16

Prayer:

Pray using what is written below or write/pray your own.

Lord, would you help me to delight myself in you? To remember who you are so that I might live a life of gratitude and praise and experience the joy and peace that comes from above.



LET'S CONNECT

I hope you have found this little eBook to be a help. For more from me be sure to follow me on Instagram at **@Redemptiveparenting**

I started the account because of my passion to encourage and equip parents of all age children in wisdom with hope in the gospel. On my website www.kristenhatton.com you will also find blog posts and podcasts on a variety of parenting related topics. A few blog posts that may interest you that you can search for are for parents of graduating high school seniors:

- When You Feel Emotionally Schizophrenic
- Turning Pages: From The Perspective of a Graduating Senior (written by my daughter the week of her graduation in 2016)
- To The Parents Whose Kids Are Growing Up Too Fast
- Embracing a New Normal After a Child Leaves for College

You will notice too on my website that I speak regularly to parents and have a few books for teens as well as the one for parents mentioned in this eBook. Furthermore, on Amazon you will see I have a public book list with recommendations for Parents of Emerging Adults. Here is the direct link:
https://www.amazon.com/hz/wishlist/ls/33GI5BTIUUE9?ref_=wl_share

Last but not least, if you are in Dallas I am a therapist contracted by Magnolia Counseling Group. I love to work with teen girls, parents and adult women of all ages. I also periodically run counseling groups for moms of teens and for those transitioning to the emptynest. Please email me at kristen@magnoliacounselinggroup if interested in individual or group therapy. And if you are anywhere in the state of Texas or Oklahoma where I am also licensed I offer virtual appointments too.

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