

Graduations, Independence, and Goodbyes

By Dr. Dale Simpson

Graduation... A time of accomplishment and satisfaction; also, a forward-looking moment heralding what is to come. For many students and parents, graduation is experienced as a fulfilling event met with relief and happiness. For others, this stage of life can create anxiety and stress. What are the things that parents need to consider for this milestone to be a satisfying part of life?

High school graduation is one of the rites of passage in our culture that carries a sense of moving into adulthood. The home-based student enters a new stage of life where they began to think of living in new surroundings. After graduation, thoughts of experiencing the world in a new way increase as our children look to establish themselves. They increasingly want to direct their lives in particular ways. They will want to set their rules and forge a new life separate from parents.

Of course, to some degree, this process of individuation has been going on since the terrible two's. But graduation portends the home stretch of this process. We are now in the final few innings of the game.

The overall tasks for the family are twofold. For the child, the task is to gradually finish the process of taking full responsibility for themselves in the world. They will make more choices around lifestyle issues than they ever have. The building blocks to managing their lives are, by this time, either there or not there. Parents' role in teaching is less prominent. Mistakes will be made, just as they have up to this point. However, a source of anxiety can emerge because mistakes at this level have the potential to be devastating in their consequences (e.g. bankruptcy, pregnancies, entering into bad marriages, etc.).

For parents, the task is to let go in an appropriate way. Trusting that you have placed the basic life skills into your children is important. Accepting your role as consultant and avoiding the temptation to micromanage your child is crucial. The goal is to live between the two unhealthy positions of total detachment or over control. Letting children know you believe in them and not over reacting when they make mistakes supports this process. The big problem for parents is our anxiety control. This is the monster to deal with during this period of emancipation.

Let's enjoy the fruit of our labor and the hard work of our children as they enter the graduation season. Help them in the next few years leave the nest with peace and encouragement. We've come too far to drop the ball now.

Dale Simpson, PhD, is the father of five grown children. As a practicing psychologist for more than 36 years, he has counseled children, teens, adults and couples and is currently practicing in Venice, Florida. Dr. Simpson was a co-founder and publisher of Homeschooling Today Magazine, wrote a column called Inside the Family for the magazine, served as a featured speaker at numerous state homeschooling and parenting conferences, and is the publisher of Learning for Life Press. A Study in Wisdom, Homeschooling for Life, The Easy to Make Paper Airplane Book, and the **Think It, Feel It, Say It Board Game** are published by Learning for Life Press. Sign up for our free newsletter and also drop by for free articles on family life. www.learningforlifepress.com

You may republish this as long as you show author credit and include our webpage.