

When Children Reach Adulthood



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“One Improved Unit” is an original column appearing sporadically on Monday at Everything-Voluntary.com, by the founder and editor Skyler J. Collins. Archived columns can be found here. OIU-only RSS feed available here.

Many, if not most, of my fellow Americans would disagree with mine and my wife’s latest decision on what to do with our children when they turn 18. Let me first explain what I was thinking and why, and then I’ll probably shock you with our new course of action.

Typical American Attitude

The typical American attitude towards children turning 18 is to kick them out of the house. And that’s been my plan until recently. Presumably, children become adults at 18 and allowing them to stay home dissuades them from leaving the nest and learning to fend for themselves, thereby entering the world of grown-ups. They’re either sent away to college or encouraged to get a job and their own apartment. It builds responsibility and financial intelligence, supposedly. Now, all of that might be true, but is it ideal based on our needs as humans? I no longer think so.

Our Decision

As unschoolers, our primary job as parents is to facilitate our children’s learning and to help them meet their needs. Kicking them out of the house at 18 seems like washing your hands of what I consider a lifelong commitment. If our children prefer staying home, I think I should respect that. Whether or not I charge them rent is a matter of my own personal finances. I’m confident that we can work out a solution that meets both our needs.

The unschooling consideration aside, what really helped my wife and I decide that we would allow our children to stay as long as they’d like was a look at our evolution as a species. According to psychologist Peter Gray, the single-family home is an unnatural environment for raising children. Throughout our evolution, “households” consisted of children, parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. In other words, children had community and made connections with several adults, not just mom and dad. As such, not only will we allow our children to remain with us when they turn 18, but we will encourage them to stay with us as they start and raise their families. We want to give our children and

our grandchildren the best environment possible for healthy development.

Final Thoughts

My in-laws lived with us when we bought our home with them. After our second child was born, they felt that it was time for them to move out. I think they sensed as much from me. I regret that. I wish they had stayed. Thankfully, they live only a few blocks away and my children are at their house most evenings and sleep over on Fridays. They have very deep connections with my kids. My wife and I hope to foster the same type of environment with our grandchildren, and even our great-grandchildren. So long as we have the room!

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