

HatchedUX

I2: User Research

Project Description

Being a parent is often considered to be a full-time job. When young adults gain the autonomy to leave the house, many parents are impacted by the drastic change in lifestyle—just as they were when their child(ren) first entered their lives. These parents—commonly referred to as “empty nesters” —often struggle to adapt to a life without the constant presence of their child(ren). The goal of HatchedUX will be to find a way to lessen the emotional burden these parents face as they begin a new chapter in their lives.

Interview Questions

1. How many children do you have?
2. How old are they?
3. How long has it been since you were “empty nested”?
4. What is your relationship status?
5. What is your occupation?
6. What is your community like? What groups do you interact with?
7. What have you noticed is the biggest difference in your life since this change?
 - a. What are the benefits?
 - b. What are the downsides?
8. How have you had to adjust your lifestyle since this change?
9. How has your daily routine changed?
 - a. What did your routine used to look like?
 - b. What does it look like now?
10. Do you find that you have more free time? What do you do with it?
11. What is the most challenging part of this life change?
 - a. What do you miss?
 - b. What is hard?
12. What is the most exciting part of this life change?
 - a. Has anything surprised you?
13. How does your partner feel about the change? (If relevant)
14. Has your relationship changed with your partner? If so, how?
15. Has your relationship with your friends change? If so how?
16. What were your hobbies and interests before having kids?
17. How have your hobbies and interests changed before and after having kids?
18. What would you like to do or try in the near future?
19. How has the way you interact with your child(ren) changed since they left the house?
20. If there anything that you used to do with your child(ren) before they left which you no longer do?
 - a. If so, what?
21. Lastly, would you be willing to meet with me (us) in the future to provide feedback on our project?

Interview Transcript

Interview date: October 7, 2018

Alright. So, I have a list of questions that we can go through and if you ever feel as if you want to pass, just let me know. You don't have to answer anything you are not comfortable with.

A: Ok.

And everything will be kept anonymous.

A: Ok.

Do you have any questions about what this project is about?

A: No. No, I think I'm good.

And I'll be taking notes if you don't mind... Alright. So first, how many children do you have?

A: Two.

How old are they now?

A: 23 and 18—or 19. I'm sorry, he just turned 19.

So, your 19-year-old just recently left?

A: Yes. He is a freshman.

What college does he go to?

A: He goes to Pierce Junior College—or Pierce Community College in Lakewood Washington. But he definitely moved out. And he has an apartment.

So how long has it been since you've been "empty nested" then?

A: He moved out... I'm gonna say 6 weeks now because we helped him move out.

And... what would you say your occupation is? Are you working or...?

A: I am a social worker. I work with older adults in assisted living.

What have you noticed has been the biggest difference in your life since the change?

A: I would say... the top 3 are the meal-- grocery shop and meal prep... and meal decisions between my husband and I are totally different. And then... laundry and cleaning (laughs) and also just... open amounts of time. It's a huge difference, really. The flow of our work—of our week.

How would you say you've been spending your time now?

A: I've been really working on getting some hobbies. I realize I need some hobbies (laughs). My husband and I are doing some... a few more... we're exercising more together. So, we're working out a

little more together. And then... I think we're now just kinda trying to get a new flow of how our week will be. We're not quite there yet (laughs), but we're working on it. It's new.

Would you say that the more time you have now is beneficial at all? Or is it... are there any downsides to it?

A: Aw, we miss him. I think we miss the structure of our high school son. He's a baseball player so we were really—he was so active with baseball that that was what we did. That was our hobby. So, at first it was new and different, but I think now we're starting to see we have time to do some new interests, new hobbies. So... it will be good. We still just miss him.

So, aside from exercising, have you picked up any other hobbies?

A: We did some different cooking—we started to cook together more. We also did—what did we do—we made a decision to do one movie a week. So, we're having date night. And my husband started golfing. So, the thing about my husband—he finally has more time to golf... I have been seeing my sister-in-law and some friends a little more than I usually did. Other than that, I don't quite have my hobbies figured out yet. I'm working on it.

How has your daily routine changed?

A: I guess I would say—back to the structure of helping my son get his breakfast, get off to school—so I have a lot more time to myself in the morning, before work. And then also in the evening, I don't have to rush home. I don't have to be home like I used to like for dinner... So, it's changed. The timing has changed, the structure is different.

So, do you find that you spend more time at work?

A: I work part-time so I can't really. So, what I've been doing is taking my dogs for walks, and then when my husband gets home we are trying to start working out together and going to our health club. We do have more time for ourselves (laughs). But we definitely need to have... we both realize that we need more structure in our day-to-day like we used to have with our kids.

What do you think is the most challenging part of adjusting to this lifestyle?

A: Let's see... that's a hard one. I think because we were so close to our son we really miss his humor and just our family time. I think it is challenging because... If we could have-- six months ago, 8 months ago-- if we had known what this was like, I think we could've put some planning and thought into some pre-arranged trips-- travel and activities—that were already set up—like concerts and tickets or things we could have done, had it already been built in—it would have not been as... it's a very different life! Because I've raised kids for all these years. You know—I've had two boys at home! So... yeah. And working part-time since I'm not full time. I do realize I have to make more efforts to reach out to friends and have things on my schedule for the week.

So—going back to earlier when you said grocery shopping and laundry and cleaning were struggles for you—can you elaborate a bit more on these?

A: So, my son ate a lot (laughs) as an athlete. And so my husbands—and then I'm a vegetarian—so my husband's been having to—instead of making two, sometimes three or even 4 portions of meat, or the entrée—he's been having to go to one. Cuz I don't eat that dinner. So, we're really having to... he's doing those meal kits in the grocery store, but then he's having to put it away because we don't eat the same meals. So, the grocery list is very different. And then cleaning: the laundry is a lot less—the towels, all that, has been very drastically reduced. We didn't realize our son made such a big impact on our lives (laughs). And the dirty—the amount of cleaning in our bathroom, his bathroom... I don't even have to clean his area, really.

When you grocery shop, do you find that you over shop a lot?

A: Yeah, I did. I still am buying the things that he... the products, all the different food things that he liked. The first couple of weeks I did that and now I'm not doing that so the grocery bill has gone down considerably. And he also... we needed to stock a lot more fresh fruits and things that he ate. We could get by on a lot smaller portions.

Is there anything that is exciting for you? About the sudden change and all?

A: It is exciting. What I kind of think is that it's a whole new chapter. To me it's almost like being... retired in a way. Like it's our first retirement. Because we—since we're 53—we have a lot of work life left. We still have time to work, but we're not structured by the Seattle Public School calendar. So now for the first time ever we don't have to vacation on Christmas break or spring break. That is a big difference for us. So that part is exciting for us. Cuz we never really pulled our kids out of school too much, for trips, unless we had to so we stuck to the school calendar. So now we're not on the school calendar.

Do you have any upcoming plans? For the future?

A: I think we're gonna do a trip once our son comes home for Christmas. We're gonna go on a ski trip. We don't know where yet. Probably in Washington.

Is it just the son in community college that will be returning for Christmas?

A: Our other son lives in Seattle, but he does not live with us and he really does not come over much cuz he works at the (couldn't hear) and he's trying to get into med school. So he's really trying to... he works and volunteers quite a bit.

So—going off of that—how has the way you interacted with your children changed?

A: Well, I've had to try to not be... I'm treating to treat them more as adults, but also provide support and guidance, but also—sort of—let them figure out their own lives. And I'm letting them come to me more than... I still text them a lot—if they need any special groceries, or if they need me to pick anything up for them. But I'm letting them be more willing to reach out to me. More of a... I don't wanna say coach, but more of a... support/mentor maybe? Maybe not so much of a mom. But actually, the last time we all got together, we had a lot of fun. Because they are adults now. They're not little boys anymore. And I think they also want to come home, but they also want their own space now.

What form of communication do they usually use to contact you?

A: Text.

How does your partner feel about the change?

A: My husband is... I think we both were sad at first. And we still kinda miss having the boys in the house, but he's doing ok. He's doing better. I think he was more impacted because he was very involved with my son's baseball and all the sports growing up. So, he has a lot more time to himself than he did—than I did, actually. And he used to coach my son too so...

What were your hobbies and interests before you had your kids?

A: I was just talking to a coworker about this. I was pretty much just a mom—full-time mom, part-time social worker. And then... I was pretty much living through my kids' interests (laughs). And then also my dogs. We have two dogs so walking and taking care of my dogs. Some off and on exercise—walking, running. And then just time with friends. I've never really had any artistic hobbies lined up, but I think I'm gonna need them.

My mom recently picked up scrapbooking and she really loves it (laughs).

A: Oh! That's good! I need something like that. And I have the time that I can really focus on length about (couldn't hear). But scrapbooking huh?

Yeah. She especially loves Shutterfly. Have you heard of that website?

A: Oh cool! Yeah! That'd be good. Yeah, I'm still trying to come up with what I'm gonna do. I used to sew too so I might start sewing again.

Have you found that you are spending more time with friends in your community?

A: Yes, I did. I have spent more time with my sister-in-law and... I did go to a dinner with some other moms that have been empty nested. It was fun! It was like a support empty nest group.

Was there anything you used to do with your children, before they left, that you miss doing now?

A: I think just watching them and supporting them with their sports.

So, did your older son also participate in sports?

A: Yes. He played soccer and in college he played gold and he played baseball too. So, lots and lots—when they were little—soccer, baseball—little league. My other son played lacross... oh and basketball. He played basketball too. So that and we used to cook together too—as a family. And I guess we also used to watch movies. We did movie night. And then we would go to movies always too; especially during the holidays. So yeah, those things we aren't doing anymore.

I think we got through most of the set questions we prepared, but is there anything else you would like to provide feedback on or have questions about?

A: So, would it be like advice? Or what's the product you were thinking of to help people through this stage of life? I think the way—like how I was saying it's like a first retirement—I guess that's not the right word, retirement, but people should know that they're going to need structure. Or that it's gonna be a bigger impact than you think. To me, it was personally, but I also think that it's exciting for myself. I'm happy for him, I'm so excited for him, but I'm sad for me. I think also being understanding that you might need to reach out for some counseling. I can see how it can be very... you could slip into some depression. Because it's a huge life change. I think for some families, maybe for others its not as much, but for some families it's a really big change. I think it's awesome that you guys are helping other get through it. And the food thing: we did not anticipate the portions. That was huge. If there was like an app thing that would kinda say you used to always make this, but you need to make a third less... that was big. And still continues to be.

So as of right now, our project is pretty open ended, and a lot of people do choose to make apps. But it could be anything, really. It could be a physical product, or a service we could provide.

A: Yeah or like a website where it could walk through what to expect when you're an empty nester. I don't know if you know this, but there's a book called "What to Expect When You're Expecting," so "What to Expect When You're An Empty Nester." But I really think—my key thing that, if I could change it, purposely for the first two months, I wish I had lined up some prepaid, like, concerts, things that we already would have been locked into and had reserved and I could have just known we would be busy. One thing each week is what I'm trying to say. I think that would've helped us. And it is exciting—don't get me wrong. It's an exciting time for us too cuz we get redesign the rest of our life. Until we retire, we have another chunk of life that we didn't really think we had! I mean we just never really thought about it. And then the whole downsizing thing—that's another thing people look at. I mean of their house was their family home. I think that's sort of the next level thing. People think, "well maybe I'll downsize." And we're actually talking about that. That's the next thing. Is our space too big? Is our home too big now? Do we want a smaller space now? Do we want to keep our house so that our sons can come home and stay the night? Or will they always have their own place? Once our second son graduates from college, that's probably the next kind of planning. Oh, I'm sorry! I was gonna say that what my husband and I were gonna start working on our house. We're going to start painting (sounds excited), change the colors... We're gonna keep our son's room as it is cuz he told us to. But we're gonna, kind of, do some decorating and home improvement. So really that's my biggest hobby. I don't know why I didn't think about that.

I love watching HGTV with my mom (laughs).

A: I totally love watching that! In fact, I was just watching this one called "Restored." He goes in and restores old homes that have been updated too much to what they used to be.

Oh! That's so interesting!

A: Yeah, isn't that cool?

Completely opposite of what most people do.

A: Anyway, so we're probably going to do that and... travel. Those are our two new things. So it is exciting!

Oh, I did have one more question! Did you feel any of these... any bouts of loneliness after your first son left? Or was did it not hit you until...

A: I did, except we... Our second son *really* missed our first... So, when our first son left, when he went to college even though he was still in city—he was right at the UW—he really missed his brother. And so that made us feel... That was an adjustment. But then our youngest son was still in high school, so we were really busy with his activities. And then... he knew—our youngest son—said, “now both your kids are out of the house, mom and dad.” So, he was really concerned about us so that was nice. We just need to make sure we keep doing fun things. So, it was really nice that he acknowledged that it was gonna be different... We still have two dogs!

Not replacement puppies, right (laughs)?

A: No, no. They're old so... And then I would say the biggest thing for women--for moms--though, is reaching out, making sure they have a support group. Acknowledging that you're a mom, but a mom for adults now. And trying to find fun with some of your former moms—I mean moms that are going through the same thing. Because I have friends that I work with that aren't empty nesters, but I have a group of friends of moms that are empty nesters so we can, y'know, talk it over.

Do you feel that your husband also needs a support group?

A: He does, but he's doing that through by making sure he's keeping up with his weekly golfer friends. And then he is actually doing--routinely getting together to watch some of the games with my older son. So now they're having their own support.

A: Are there any questions you think I missed?

No! I think you did a great job! I was telling my husband, when I was coming over, y'know it's interesting. There really isn't much out there in the world about... People talk about empty nesting, but they don't talk about how dramatic you feel. And what a drastic change. There's moving out and all that build up to getting them moved out, into college. And then it just feels kind of open-ended. It's an open-ended time in your life. So, anything you guys come up with, I think will be amazing. It's good you're doing it.

Going off of that, would you be willing to meet with me and my teammates in the future?

A: Yeah sure, anytime. I'm part time so I'm pretty open. Like I said, I have a lot of time on my hands!

Key Insights

- Users from this group are subject to a drastic change in lifestyle—from daily routines to an abundant amount of free time.
- Certain users may be susceptible to emotional distress (i.e. depression), however some also acknowledge the opportunity to be an exciting new part of their life.

- Support groups consisting of people in similar situations are helpful to these users.