



Boomerang kids

YOU THOUGHT THEY HAD MOVED OUT FOR GOOD? NOT ALWAYS
BY CLAIRE LANDES ALTSCHULER

When Barbara Bush's daughter and son-in-law, Kim and Tom Caldara, moved in with her last summer, they all expected it would be temporary. Bush suggested the move,

inviting the couple and their new baby daughter, Lilly, to stay with her during the heat of summer. The Caldaras' apartment in a neighboring town didn't have air-conditioning

Barbara Bush, daughter Kim and granddaughter Lilly in Bush's suburban New York home. Kim and her family moved back in for a while.

and the heat was unbearable.

But what began as a short-term stay in Bush's seven-bedroom home in New York's Westchester County has stretched into months. The Caldaras began looking for a house, and the search proved difficult—two contracts

fell through before they finally bought a home. Kim and Tom have sold their apartment and will move into their new house this spring.

Bush, who was separated from her husband two years ago, says having her daughter back home was a good experience overall. "It was just nice to have the company," she says. And she feels fortunate to have had the chance to spend so much time with her granddaughter. "She was with me from the start. It's great."

All across the country, empty nests are filling up again. According to a recent AARP study, 28 percent of baby boomers have had an adult child move back home. The reasons adult children return home vary, but debts, unemployment and divorce are the most common.

Although much is made of the challenges so-called "boomerang kids" create (disrupting their parents' routines or imposing financial burdens), a temporary move can be an opportunity to improve relationships. In the best circumstances, experts say, living together again can give family members a chance to know each other as adults. And, when rules and expectations are ironed out beforehand, the experience may foster greater closeness.

"If you asked the parents, most would be fairly positive about having their children back home," says William Aquilino, associate professor of human development and family studies at the University of Wisconsin. "As long as parents see that their adult children are making progress," either by furthering their education or looking for work, most parents accept the move," he says.

Of course, not all families do as well as Bush and the Caldaras. Tensions arise when parents and children regress into outdated roles or clash over privacy issues. Adult children who have spent time—often

years—on their own and are accustomed to independence may bristle when questioned about their habits. And parents who finally had their home to themselves may resent having to share it again.

The key to success, experts say, is anticipating problems and discussing expectations ahead of time. Issues like privacy (for both parent and child), division of chores and expected financial contributions such as rent should be addressed in advance.

Parents and children should work out "what rights the adult child has (and) what is legitimate for the parent to expect," says Larry Bumpass, professor emeritus of sociology at the University of Wisconsin. Requiring children to do their own cooking and laundry ensures that parents aren't forced back into old caregiver roles.

When Barbara Martinez and her two young sons moved back home after her divorce in 2000, her widowed father expected her to clean her room and make her bed every day. Martinez, a successful businesswoman, says that, at first, this made her feel like a child again. But she respected her father's rules and even grew to appreciate her new habits.

Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, author of "Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from Late Teens through the Twenties," says for many young adults, moving back home "makes it easier to become fully independent because it may allow them to save some money and get some extra education or training that will enable them to get a better job."

And parents can benefit, too. Martinez, who has since remarried and lives near her father, says, "There was so much good that came out of living with him again. Not only did they grow closer, but her father also got to know his grandsons. Moving back home "helped me, but it was also good for Dad," she says.

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