

Boomerang kids are returning to the nest, but empty nesters would prefer their space

New research reveals the Bank of Mum and Dad is funding young Aussie lifestyles with parents reluctant to have their kids move back home

Sydney, SEP 2024 – New research highlights a rising trend of ‘boomerang children’ returning home due to economic challenges, revealing a surprising twist: most parents would prefer their nest remained empty. Meanwhile most empty nesters find themselves supporting their kids after they move out.

The study revealed four in five (80%) parents over 50 wouldn’t encourage their children to move back in with them. Instead, they prefer their children develop their independence (85%) and an ability to stand on their own feet (66%). This allows parents to enjoy their retirement (34%) and the nest to themselves (27%).

Commissioned by Australian Seniors in partnership with consumer research group MyMavins, the [Empty Nesters Report 2024](#) surveyed more than 1,200 Australians over 50. The research uncovered the impacts of an empty nest and the dynamics of ‘boomerang children’ moving back home. While empty nesters enjoyed more freedom (57%) and new purpose (37%), many former empty nesters made sacrifices to accommodate their kids’ return (47%).

The highs and lows of empty nesting

Most (70%) parents said they’re enjoying the extra time that comes with their children living out of home, with almost as many feeling better financially (64%). As the cost of living puts pressure on Australian households, more than half (51%) of empty nesters agree they now feel less guilty about spending money on themselves, with travel and holidays (55%) emerging as the top expenditure.

Many empty nesters are also embracing the opportunity to re-prioritise themselves and their relationships, spending more time with their partners (41%) and taking up new hobbies or interests (35%). Interestingly, a quarter (25%) have replaced their kids with ‘fur babies’, buying or adopting a pet since their children moved out, with the majority (65%) admitting pets helped with the transition to an empty nest.

Alongside positive feelings of pride (44%) and happiness (29%) that come with empty nesting, almost as many parents felt sad (36%) and worried (29%) when children leave the nest. Women in particular are more likely to feel sad (44% of women vs. 27% of men) and worried (34% of women vs. 24% of men) when their kids fly from the nest.

The survey delved into the worst aspects of children moving out, with missing the children (65%), less frequent contact (61%), and increased worry (56%) topping the list. Over half (51%) of current empty nesters and almost two thirds (65%) of former empty nesters say they wish their kids had stayed at home longer.

“This life stage brings about mixed feelings and will take time to adjust. Initially many grieve the loss, and fear the relationship could flounder” says Elisabeth Shaw, Clinical Psychologist and CEO of Relationships Australia NSW. “Quite a few factors will influence the success of this transition. Whether the move is for positive reasons, the relationships are on good terms, and there is a good connection that offers reassurance that contact will be maintained, will all help ease worry and sadness.”

What are the top reasons for kids moving back home?

According to the survey, ‘boomerang children’ moving back in is seen as a last resort for many parents, with most only considering it in exceptional circumstances. These include kids having nowhere else to go (85%), experiencing financial (83%), personal (77%) or relationship struggles (73%), or going through major life events (63%).

Financial struggles are the top reason for almost two in five (39%) ‘boomerang children’ moving back home, reflecting the extent to which cost of living pressures are impacting young adults. This was closely followed by relationship and personal issues (30%), and a lack of alternative living options (28%), demonstrating pressures from the current rental crisis and ongoing housing affordability issues.

For those who’ve welcomed their kids back home, close to half (47%) feel they’ve made sacrifices, including losing rooms in the home (23%), altering their daily schedules (15%), and eating out less (15%). In turn, most parents expect their adult kids to help with chores (76%) and contribute to the household budget (62%).

“Many parents want to help their adult children and would find it hard to turn them away,” Elisabeth Shaw said. “I commonly see families where there were insufficient discussions about the terms of coming home. There can be unspoken expectations, or loose arrangements which can lead to resentment and conflict. The narrative that children are coming home for financial reasons can immediately lead to an assumption that they will be fully financially supported, rather than agreeing to pool resources so everyone benefits. There is an assumption that parents keep giving so adult children can be independent in the end - and that “end” can be ill-defined,” she added. “I strongly recommend that the terms of the arrangements are agreed, and frank conversations are had before the move back in. It is much easier to discuss risks and potential hurdles before they have happened, when everyone is most keen to make it work.”

The Bank of Mum and Dad

The study found that the Bank of Mum and Dad plays an important role in the lives of many young Aussies, regardless of whether they've moved out. In fact, three-quarters (75%) of empty nesters said they still support their children financially after leaving home.

Turning attention to the growing issue of unaffordable housing in many parts of Australia, the report also revealed how parents are reaching into their pockets to help their kids afford living out of home to support their independence. Almost a third (31%) have given financial assistance or an early inheritance to help their children move out of home, including contributing money towards affording a bond, paying rent, or putting down a home deposit. A further two in five (38%) parents are considering financially supporting their adult kids in the same way as economic pressures worsen.

In navigating the complexities of 'boomerang children' and the dynamics of the empty nest, the research underscores a significant societal shift. While many parents cherish the newfound freedom and financial stability that an empty nest brings, the reality of children returning home due to economic pressures poses challenges and sacrifices. As families adapt to these evolving dynamics, the report encourages a balanced approach, emphasising independence for adult children while offering support where necessary. It highlights the resilience and adaptability of Australian families in facing these changes head on, reflecting broader societal trends and economic realities shaping family life today.

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About Australian Seniors

Australian Seniors launched in 1998 to meet the needs of the often ignored over 50s market. Since then, we've helped countless Australians protect the most important things in life – whether it's their family's future, valuable assets, or even their long-planned retirement.

We strive to be different through the diverse offering of our life, funeral, car, home & contents, landlords, pet, health and travel insurance products by carefully selecting underwriters that share our vision of providing insurance that's simple, easy to understand, and cost-effective. That's why our policies have helped everyone from hard-working over 50s to self-funded retirees take control of the things that matter most.

About the Australian Seniors Research Series

The Empty Nesters 2.0 Report 2024 forms part of the Australian Seniors Research Series. In its latest instalment, this study explores how financial pressures, particularly around property, have impacted empty nesters' family dynamics. The research investigates empty nesters' openness to having their adult children return home, amidst housing affordability, financial considerations, wellbeing, family relationships and available space. The research also investigates empty nesters' concerns about their children renting or facing difficulties entering the property market and how this impacts their decision making.

By comparing insights with a previous study we conducted in 2018, the report also aims to uncover evolving attitudes and concerns of empty nesters. The report is compiled based on research commissioned by Australian Seniors and conducted by MYMAVINS between 17th and 26th April 2024. The research was conducted via a quantitative online survey, gathering 1208 responses from Australians aged 50 and above who are current or former empty nesters (i.e. children have moved back home). The sample is broadly representative of this empty nester population in terms of age, gender, wealth, and state/territory.