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WHEN GROWN KIDS MOVE BACK HOME LIVING (HAPPILY) TOGETHER

In these economic times, more grown children are moving back home. The arrangement can work well for you and your child if you discuss expectations and ground rules upfront.

Set a deadline. If you do not want your child to stay indefinitely, say so. You may want to extend the offer only until the child meets a goal. *Examples:* Earning a degree...saving for a down payment on a home...recovering from an illness...or finding a job.

Decide if your adult child will pay rent and what expenses he/she will cover. Many parents don't charge rent as long as the child is pursuing mature goals, such as saving money or getting an education. However, if your money is tight and your child is working, it's not unreasonable to expect him to contribute a fixed sum monthly. Adult children usually pay for any extras they need, such as a separate phone/computer line.

Limit babysitting. Be explicit about your limits in caring for grandchildren who come to live or visit. You may want to limit it to, say, two mornings

or one night a week. If you want the overall experience to be a good one, you will need to respect your child's choices in child-rearing and avoid critical remarks.

Knock before entering. Agree on the appropriate rules for entry into one another's private spaces. Do not open your adult child's mail, read his e-mail or answer his cell phone without his okay. He should extend the same courtesy to you.

Talk about whether it's acceptable to discuss each other's health, finances and relationships with other people, and with whom. Also, make specific agreements about visitors, boyfriends/girlfriends and parties.

Split the chores. Adult children typically clean their own living spaces, do their own laundry and take care of their own pets.

Shared chores that tend to cause stress: Moving heavy trash cans... sorting and picking up the mail from shared mailboxes...and moving the car when parking is an issue. Perhaps alternate these tasks or assign them to the person who doesn't mind doing them.

Use a headset. Families often find it desirable to use headsets for listening to radio, television and music so that they don't need to adjust to one another's taste and preferred volume.

Meet regularly. After your child moves in, meet regularly—monthly is usually about right—with the specific purpose of discussing how the current rules are working. I know a mother, father and grown son who have their meeting on a weekend walk. For larger families, meetings may need to be more businesslike. Keep the meeting short, agreeing in advance on the ending time. The organizer begins by asking everyone what is working well before turning to problems. Encourage compromise and creative thinking on all sides. ■ ■

Bottom Line/Personal interviewed John L. Graham, PhD, professor of marketing and international business, University of California, Irvine. He is coauthor, with Sharon Graham Niederhaus, of *Together Again: A Creative Guide to Successful Multigenerational Living* (M. Evans). www.togetheragainbook.com.

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