



Family Values

Seasons of Parenthood: Plateau Parent

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Parents with middle-aged children have reached a plateau on the mountain of parenthood. They have completed the first circle in the parenting cycle, allowing their children to feel comfortable returning home as self-sufficient and responsible adults with an independent life of their own. They leave the circle of parenting children and now enter the second circle of parenting adults.

As in other stages, the children determine what the family tapestry will look and feel like—whether it will now include significant others, spouses, grandchildren. To a considerable degree, the adult children influence the rebirth of their parents through grandchildren, as well as decide how parents define old age and how they answer the call of freedom.

Plateau Parents now see just what their own parents experienced as they themselves became “grown up.” Many parents can’t wait to be part of another circle, to take on the responsibility of showering another generation of their family with the legacy of love they received from their parents and grandparents. Parents who aren’t grandparents find that their lives follow a mature path of independence they had never expected.

Plateau Parents are even more dramatically aware of the circular nature of life if they need to care for the oldest generations in their families. How they think about their lives from this plateau position determines what their “old age” will be like: full of promise of new adventures with children and grandchildren and new depths of discovery about work, friendships and community, or just a short run down the other side of the mountain. They are learning from both generations, their adult children and aging parents, how to live and how to grow old and how to die. This makes life on a plateau a transformative and provocative season of parenthood.

Pocket guide to the truths of Plateau Parenthood:

- **Free at last, free at last.** . . .Your children are off on their own, riding their roller coaster, having a good time and making the best of their independence. As you ride the Ferris wheel of this season, you’re exhilarated by your sense of freedom from the long years of parenthood.
- **Children are good; grandchildren are best.** From your perch high above it all, the view is wonderful, but something is missing. The gift of grandchildren fills that voice and lets you go around the circle of your soul once again.
- **Why am I feeling so creaky?** From atop the Ferris wheel you see your children fly by on their roller coaster. It looks like so much fun. But you’re grateful that being a grandparent isn’t a full-time job. You don’t have the same kind of energy.
- **Being on top is scary and lonely.** As much as you want to stay steady, you feel yourself rocking as you realize that the winds of change are strong at the top. As the wheel starts to move again, you find that your parenthood skills are needed in taking care of your own parents.

Taken from: *The Eight Seasons of Parenthood* by Barbara Unell and Jerry Wyckoff.

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