

THE PARENT TRAP  
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Lately I've been thinking about that old Woody Allen line: Insanity is hereditary. You get it from your kids.

Now, don't get me started on Woody Allen's parenting skills. But it seems he may be almost right here. We don't inherit insanity from our kids, but we may "inherit" depression.

That's what a study by Florida State and Vanderbilt Universities has found. Analyzing data gathered by the National Survey of Families and Households, researchers found that parents have significantly higher levels of depression than do adults without children.

Other important findings:

- Moms and dads get and stay depressed at about the same rate.
- Parent is a parent is a parent, which is to say that single parents, married parents, parents of young children, and parents of grown and gone children all report significantly more depression than non-parents.

In fact, as their children grow older and leave home, the incidence of depression among parents rises. How so? Yes, empty nesting can carry an emotional shock but the adage, “Little kids, little problems. Big kids, big problems,” may also explain a bit of what’s going on. Sometimes just burping a baby puts a "little worry" to rest. But no pat on the back can make our world safe for our adult children as they move beyond our protection. And while we love them differently than we loved them as babies, we love them just as much—and worry way more.

That’s what the Florida State and Vanderbilt University researchers suggested, anyway, when presenting their findings. They also hinted that, in other countries, parents might not be more depressed than non-parents. In America, especially, parenting can be an isolating experience. We value individual strength and privacy. We pride ourselves on our successes. We blame ourselves for our failures. This means that when our growing children wander astray from the paths we think are safe and onto ones that we fear, the psychological costs of parenting can quickly seem to outweigh the benefits.

More often than is good for us, apparently, Americans hoe the hard row of parenting without adequate social and emotional supports. Depression in adults costs society greatly. The workplace cost alone is as high as \$40 billion a year. So maybe it’s time to look to our state and municipal governments for policy options, to our churches, community centers, and employers for structured social supports, and, parents, to each other for all of the help, humor, and heart we can give.

Woody Allen also once said: “Most of the time I don't have much fun. The rest of the time I don't have any fun at all.” Funny quote, but not a funny reality. We parents need to have fun, to get out, to get support and perspective. Parenting is great - except that sometimes it isn't.

But you knew that.

Now, even the national numbers show it.

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