

## Intimacy, Sex & Relationship

# What To Do When The Kids Start Having Sex

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It's 2 a.m. Bill and Debby's rambling Victorian home is silent except for the loud purr of their kitten, Max, snoozing in the corner.

It's been a busy day. Driving to Penn State to pick up their 18 year-old daughter, Zoe, for summer break (along with her umpteen boxes of stuff), stocking the pantry with her favorite foods and readying her room for her return.

It's exactly the way she left it last fall — a row of white lace pillows neatly stacked against the cherry headboard, the pale blue coverlet stitched by her grandma and the blue gingham dust ruffle. And perched in the center of her bed, like the cherry on a sundae, is Zoe's most beloved stuffed animal, Caramel — patiently waiting for a cuddle.

It will be great to have her girl home, Debby thinks as she imagines the fun they'll have shopping and talking together. She can't wait for the old house to be filled with the sounds of Zoe's friends and her laptop singing, "You've got mail."

Bill is admittedly more ambivalent about her return. Living as empty nesters for the past year has had its challenges and advantages. After some brief marital therapy, he and Deb have reconnected sexually and he worries there will be less private time for intimacy. But they've vowed to continue focusing on themselves, and he's hopeful they will.

Just then, Bill and Deb are startled out of their peaceful reveries by the rhythmic squeaking of their daughter's bed springs, followed by giggles and little gasps. It stops for a few moments. Then continues with even more intensity and squeals of pleasure.

"Oh my," exclaims Debby, "I think Zoe has a guest."

"Oh my nothing" says Bill. "This isn't going to be happening under my roof. Not with my little girl!" He jumps up from the bed and marches toward the door as he fumbles to tie his flannel robe. Deb is right behind him pleading with him to stop.

"Bill, no ... she's been on her own for a year — things have changed for her." But Bill would hear none of it. "My house, my rules." That's his motto.

"Bill, please," she continues, reaching for his shoulder. "Let's talk." Acquiescing, Bill slumps down on the bed, resting his head in his hands.

"Debby ... what are we going to do?"

Seemingly overnight our kids are grown. Every stage of parenting presents a new range of adventures. Wasn't it only yesterday that we anxiously waited for them to step off the school bus or kissed away their boo-boos?

In the blink of an eye, they're returning from college (or wherever) full of the freedom and independence of living alone. They think it's perfectly OK to come home at 4 a.m. or not at all, doing whatever they choose. We're still "the parents" (but the meaning becomes less clear). Their expectations for us may change, but our expectations haven't. We're responsible for their well being.

Just because our adult kids may be having sex and are chronological adults doesn't mean they have no further need for our education, guidance and parental support.

So what should Deb and Bill do? What would you do? Each one of us will handle this situation differently depending upon our values and beliefs.

But I can tell you what not to do. Don't overreact. Sit down together, talk with your son or daughter, and clarify your feelings and the facts. (And although it's a bit late, a talk about safe sex and contraception is definitely warranted).

Whether you say "my way or the highway" or "I'd rather have them home than in a parked car somewhere" is your decision. But decide carefully. This might become a nodal life event that will shape their future sexual development.

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