

BOOK CLUB DISCUSSION GUIDE

THE LOUD QUIET

Love, Laughter, and Life in the Empty Nest

by Rick and Clancy Denton

Conversation starters for empty-nest book clubs,
friend groups, and anyone pulling up a chair to the table.

A Note Before You Begin

The Loud Quiet moves through a year in four parts, Fall, Winter, Spring, and Summer, mirroring the rhythm of a first year as empty nesters. This guide follows that same shape. Feel free to work through it cover to cover, or pull the questions that match wherever your own nest currently stands.

A gentle heads-up: several questions touch on grief, marriage strain, and identity loss. Let your group set the tone... some nights call for wine and laughter, others call for tissues. Both are the point of this book.

Before You Dive In

1. Where are you right now in your own “empty nest” story, dreading it, deep in it, or years past it? What made you pick up this book?
2. The Dentons write, “Empty nest is a terrible name... it's not the absence of something. It's the beginning of something else.” What does the phrase “empty nest” mean to you?
3. Clancy's opening question to Rick was, “What if I don't like us when she leaves?” Was there a single moment, a sentence, a scene, a drive home, when this transition became real for you?

Fall

RAMEN, RUGS, AND REALITY

4. Clancy is undone by a forgotten packet of ramen; Rick, by a toy horse falling out of the car. What small, unglamorous object has ambushed you with grief or nostalgia?
5. On the way to dinner, Teagan cries and says, “I miss my cat,” not her parents. The Dentons call this “a moment of grace.” Why do you think they felt that way, and do you agree?

DO WE STILL LIKE EACH OTHER?

6. The book names the thing many couples feel but don't say out loud: “What are we now if we're not parenting together?” How honestly do you think couples talk about this before the nest actually empties?
7. The Dentons describe parenting as “a beautiful and distracting kind of glue.” What was the “glue” in your own household, and what has (or hasn't) replaced it?

WE THOUGHT WE'D BE IN BELIZE • THE CURE FOR HAPPINESS

8. Several early chapters puncture the fantasy version of empty-nesting: endless travel, effortless freedom. Where has reality undersold or oversold your expectations of this stage?

Winter

WE TRIED 30 EMPTY NESTER DATES SO YOU DON'T HAVE TO

9. The Dentons suggested several specific ideas, such as hiking, live theater, museums, on how to reconnect over date nights. Which one(s) resonated most with you?

EMPTY NESTER QUESTIONS

10. In this chapter, Rick and Clancy ask each other 5 questions. Choose one and share your answers with the group.

THE KID GLUE

11. The book cites the rise in “gray divorce” and argues that the empty nest “doesn't fix anything. It reveals it.” Did that land as sobering, validating, or something else for you?
12. Clancy grieved the laundry and grocery lists; Rick missed his gaming buddy (who took the Nintendo Switch to college). What's the small, surprising thing you didn't expect to miss?
13. The Dentons admit their marriage had a real low point when their oldest was five, long before the nest emptied. Why do you think they chose to include that instead of presenting only the “after” version of their marriage?

Spring

SPRING BREAK, REMIXED

14. Clancy expects the now-familiar rhythm of goodbyes to feel routine, and it doesn't. Has any part of this transition gotten harder with repetition rather than easier for you?

A MAP OF OUR MARRIAGE IN FOUR HOUSES

15. If you mapped your own marriage or family life onto the homes you've lived in, what would each house represent?

CONVERSATIONS WE'D RATHER NOT HAVE

16. In this chapter, Clancy describes an afternoon that turned into unplanned estate-planning talk with her parents and brother, sorting through wills, power of attorney, and old family roles that resurfaced around the table. Has your own family navigated a similar conversation with aging parents, or is it still one you're avoiding? What's made it possible, or what's holding you back?

WE USED UP ALL OUR WORDS

17. During Tanner's graduation week, the Dentons had to balance celebration with the sadness of losing Rick's mom to Alzheimer's, calling it a stretch of time where “joy and loss, pride and heartbreak” were “braided together so tightly you can't tell where one ends and the other begins.” Has your own family had to hold joy and grief in the same moment like that?

Summer

EMPTY NEST, FULL HOUSE (AGAIN) · PARENTING NEVER REALLY ENDS

18. The book leans into the idea that parenting never really ends, it just changes shape. In what ways has your role as a parent shifted rather than stopped?

EXXIETY AND OTHER NEW EMOTIONS

19. Rick and Clancy coin the term “exxiety,” the anxiety of no longer being able to see for yourself that your kids are okay once they're not under your roof. Do you

find yourself worrying more about your adult children than you did when they were younger?

HUMOR IS HOW WE SURVIVE

20. The Dentons call humor their “pressure valve” for grief, cracking jokes even in the middle of probate paperwork and hospice logistics. When you're moving through something heavy, do you find yourself reaching for humor the way they do, or do you cope differently?

WISDOM FROM OUR ELDERS

21. What's one piece of advice from an “elder” in your life that you cherish in this stage of empty nesting?

WE STILL LIKE EACH OTHER

22. Looking back at old photos, Rick says, “I actually like this version of us better than the twenty-something version.” Do you like the current version of yourself, or your relationships, better than an earlier one? What changed?
23. The Dentons insist you “can't coast” into liking your marriage on the other side of parenting. It takes intention. What's one intentional thing you could try this month, inspired by something in the book?

*Thank you for reading *The Loud Quiet* with your book club.*
Rick and Clancy Denton