



WORDS AND THEIR STORIES

What Is 'Empty Nest Syndrome'?

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And now, *Words and Their Stories*, from VOA Learning English.

On this program we explore words and expressions in the English language. We give definitions, examples, and notes on usage.

Today we talk about a word from the animal world – a nest. For some animals, especially birds, a nest is a shelter and a place to raise their young. So, it should not be surprising that we use the word “nest” to talk about our homes.

A nest can describe a **comfortable** home. And if you like to nest, you like to make your home **comfy and cozy**. In fact, a childbirth expert may tell pregnant women to expect strong nesting feelings to develop late in their pregnancy. This common experience is a way a woman’s body prepares for the arrival of the new baby.

However, feathering your nest is quite a different thing. If you feather your own nest, you are not making your home comfortable by adding feathers. You are making yourself rich, especially in a way that is unfair or dishonest.

But let’s get back to nesting.

An empty nest is a family home where the children have grown up and left. So, an empty nester is a parent whose children have grown up and left home.

Some parents may feel sad or lost when they become empty nesters. This is called empty nest syndrome. While parents may feel sad, most children are happy to become **independent** and fly the coop. “To fly the coop” is a very informal expression that means the children have left the family home.

A coop is a small structure people make for **domesticated** birds -- namely chickens: hens and roosters. We call these shelters either a “chicken coop” or a “hen house.” But, for some reason, we never say “hen coop” or “chicken house.”

Online, you might see the expression “fly the nest.” That might be more of a British English saying. In the States, when often “fly the coop” rather than “fly the nest” to mean children have left home.

However, the expression “fly the coop” has another meaning. If someone flies the coop, they leave suddenly or secretly. For example, we could say a criminal who **snuck out of** prison flew the coop.

And that’s all the time we have for this *Words and Their Stories*. Once you are finished learning all the English you can, you might have to fly the VOA Learning English coop! But until that happens, keep listening!

Until next time ... I’m Anna Matteo.

Anna Matteo wrote this lesson for VOA Learning English.

Words in This Story

comfortable -*adj.* a pleasant feeling of ease without tension

comfy (comfortable) and cozy -*adj.* feeling at ease, warm and secure

domesticated -*adj.* not wild, cared for humans for farm or home use

sneak out of -*v.* to quietly or secretly get out of a place or a requirement