

# Hecht: Kids come and kids go. And go. And go.

Pam J. Hecht , Special to WNC Parent Published 6:00 a.m. ET May 27, 2019

The other day, a child told me she was going to a different school next year. So, of course, I gave this 10-year-old troublemaker an “infraction,” which is like a naughty note home times a billion, and told her to never speak of it again.

When her parent came to pick her up, looking haggard after a long day at work, I marched over, clearing my throat in preparation for using my teacher voice.

“Run, daddy, run,” she said, hoisting her 25-pound backpack over her shoulder. “You’re in trouble, too.”

So, the calendar has the nerve to indicate that it is summer, which is fraught with little people moving on, packing it up and taking the last train out of the school year. In fact, some of them are impudently preparing to exit from your everyday life. I don’t even want to talk about certain young people leaving the country to study abroad.

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“We’re going to middle school — you’re not going to see us anymore,” the larger, more noxious kid variety tell me, with the sole intention of making me sob. I don’t give them the satisfaction. “Take a long walk on a short pier,” I say. It really is a very touching farewell scene. (They don’t have to know that I’m really sucking it up until I can hide in a closet and cry my eyes out.)

Traitors, the lot of them. Just when you get attached, it’s time for them to go.

When big kids leave

Meanwhile, I have a kid who actually had the gall to leave home forever, abandoning us like yesterday’s news. Some nonsense like college, she muttered on her way out the door.

Are you really leaving The Family? I said, in my most intimidating voice, like a mafioso. Obviously, it didn’t work.

One time, in a snit over something, my son proclaimed that he was “going away.” We thought it was a little early for an 8-year-old to be on the run, but he was quite determined. He plopped his toothbrush and a pair of underwear into a plastic grocery bag and marched out the door. It didn’t work out though, because he realized it was time for lunch.

What he was yearning for, like all of those little, soon-to-be deserters, was the sweet smell of autonomy. I used to think that playdates, sleepovers, after-school programs and camp were good things. What they really are, however, are places for kids to cultivate independence and plot and scheme their jailbreaks. I know this because, as my teen has told me in more than one fit of free-thinking, that our house is like a prison.

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It starts when they learn to walk. When my little lone ranger gave his first farewell wave and wobbled out of sight down the hall, I knew that it was just the beginning.

Really, what they don’t tell us (darn them!) is that parenting is just a series of goodbyes. The whole shebang, in fact, is geared toward grooming these little lights of our lives to leave. And there’s only so much we can do to make their ride out of Dodge a good one, as they hop into some heap of a car and gun the motor, leaving an echoing, “Eat my dust,” in their wake.

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