

The Sandwich Generation: Juggling Family Responsibilities

At a time when your career is reaching a peak and you are looking ahead to your own retirement, you may find yourself in the position of having to help your children with college expenses while at the same time looking after the needs of your aging parents. Squeezed in the middle, you've joined the ranks of the "sandwich generation".

There are 20 million Americans who are struggling to juggle caring for their elderly parents while raising their own families. The Pew Research Center (2006) estimated that 1 in 8 baby boomers are members of the sandwich generation.

Ways to cope

1. Understand your parents' life stage
 - a. Elderly parents are facing a number of losses – homes, jobs, health, independence, friends and sometimes spouses.
 - b. Roles become reversed. Someone who once took care of you; now needs your care. This can be very uncomfortable for both parent and child.
2. Talking about tough issues – finances, driving, privacy, etc. before a crisis occurs.
 - a. It is better to have discussions on hot topics before they become a problem
 - b. Learn how to communicate with respect and without blame
3. Establish "house rules: Involve yourself, your spouse, your parents and your children in the rule development. Learn to pick your battles.
4. Make sure everyone has some privacy. Your parent should have their own space, - room, TV bathroom – if possible.
5. Figure out what goes where. This might sound obvious, but your parents may be used to being surrounded by their own possessions for years and your house just isn't big enough to hold yours and theirs.
6. Work on a budget. If your parent can afford to contribute to house hold expenses, let them. It can foster a sense of accomplishment and your parents will feel that they are "doing their share". Look into power of attorney (medical and financial). Being prepared bypasses many miseries down the road when your parents are unable to make financial decisions.
7. Don't neglect yourself, your spouse or your own family when taking care of your parent. Be sure you explain fully to your children the changes in your family that will occur. Let them know that everyone will have to be flexible until a new family rhythm is developed.
8. Finally – Be Patient – it can take a while for the family to adjust to a new member in the mix. Don't let guilt or anger motivate your interactions with your parent. Enjoy the journey.



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