

Sandwiched in between

Caring for aging parents is not a new idea. More is heard about it today because more people need care for a longer time than ever before. Today, there are more older adults than teenagers. America is graying, resulting in fewer people to share in caring for elderly family members.

Families provide majority of care for elderly.

You, as a caregiver, are not alone. Families provide 80 percent to 90 percent of care for the elderly in the U.S. Caregiving can be fulfilling and rewarding; but it can also be wearying. Sadly, many people think of caregiving as a stressful sacrifice.

People in the sandwich generation, often women, are those who are taking care of their children and their parents. The people in the middle generation often feel that all their energy is spent on others, and no time is left for personal goals. Instead they are learning new roles and developing new relationships with their aging parents.

Both parents and adult children often have insecure feelings about their new roles. Caring for children is very different from caring for older adults. While children are developing physical and mental skills, older adults may be losing them. Still, elderly adults want and need the respect and independence they remember enjoying.

Old issues may resurface

Many times old family issues resurface when adult children care for a parent. One common source of trouble is unresolved emotional issues between caregiver and parent.

Handling conflicts with children is much different from dealing with a conflict with a parent. Conflicts are best resolved when approached as adult-to-adult.

It is also important to recognize the older person's right to take risks and be independent. If the one you care for is not using his or her energy to fight you for the ability to take risks, usually he or she will recognize limits. Let your older loved ones think about their situation instead of feeling they have to defend themselves.

When you are feeling 'sandwiched in'

- **Remember, you are not alone.** Share the responsibilities with others or hire someone to help. Sometimes, no- or low-cost services are available (check the yellow pages of the phone book). If you are feeling alone, join a support group.
- **Recruit family members.** They can help to support you in caring for your parents, and they may be willing to share the responsibilities.
- **Take a break.** Call a respite care center. Adults often see the need for help as a shortcoming, something to hide. For caregivers, needing a break does not mean they have failed. After taking a break, the quality of care is often improved.
- **Maintain an adult relationship.** Take a step back from situations that provoke difficult emotions. Respect yourself and remember that your parent deserves to be treated as an adult.
- **Respect your parent's right to take risks.** Everyone likes to make their own decisions about anything that affects their lives.

If you need help

Sometimes, added responsibilities quickly turn into stress, burnout and fatigue, which means you're less able to handle any of your responsibilities, let alone your new ones. If you find it difficult to adjust to this new lifestyle, talk things over with a friend, relative or clergy. Or talk to a counselor, whose objective viewpoint can help you sort things out. To make an appointment, call (810) 257-3742. In an emergency, call (810) 257-3740 or toll free at (877) 346-3648, where a counselor is available 24 hours a day. TTY users call (810) 232-6310. ©

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