

Self-care for a sandwiched generation

Tips for caregivers

More and more people are finding themselves caught between conflicting demands of taking care of aging parents or other relatives, while at the same time raising children (and sometimes grandchildren). If you are one of these people, it's likely that you put others first and tend to neglect your own health and well-being.

This issue of *Change Your Way to Health!* is for those 3 in 10 of you between 45 and 60 who have children living at home and are caring for a senior. It also applies to those who may find themselves taking care of an ill spouse, while at the same time looking after children and/or elderly parents. Here are few suggestions aimed at making your life just a little easier.

Learn to balance your time. Taking care of seniors and children can take up a great deal of time, so effective time management is essential. Try to evaluate your priorities on a weekly basis. Divide tasks into what you can do versus what you can delegate. Set limits and let others know where you stand.

Take care of your own health. If you are missing meals, losing sleep, or feeling overwhelmed, it may be time to seek counsel from a professional. It's important to take the time to keep yourself in shape, and be sure to exercise, eat healthy, and get enough sleep.

Play the hand you were dealt. The circumstances you find yourself in may not be exactly what you had hoped for. But your loved ones need you, and you need to be there for them. Don't carry around emotional baggage or thoughts like, "I wish it wasn't like this," or "How did I get stuck with this?" Come to terms with your situation and make the best of it. You'll be better for it and so will the people around you.

Live for today. Take a calm look at what you can do to make your life better for yourself, your family, and the people you are caring for today. Don't zap your energy fretting about your parent's losses (strength, independence, vitality) or worrying about the future.

Overcome your fear. Sudden or sustained responsibilities represent new demands and often require new skills. Thus, these new responsibilities can be frightening. It represents new demands and often requires new skills. While it's natural to feel anxious or reluctant, don't let these feelings overwhelm or paralyze you with inaction. Take it one step at a time.

Be good to yourself. Uncertainty or self-doubt can drain enormous amounts of nervous energy, leaving you tired and frustrated. You make mistakes, yell at people, and begin to doubt your ability even more. Don't get trapped in this vicious circle. Treat yourself well (including taking respite and wellness breaks), and you will treat others better.

Be a visionary. Learn to visualize your goals and how you'd like your life to be – for your family and anyone under your care. This visualization can include physical issues (how you'd worry less if Dad used a walker or cane when he went out), or other issues (such as a less confrontational relationship with your mother or your daughter). Imagine how things would be better if you made some changes, and then take the next step towards those changes.



Make a change!

Are you prepared should your parents or an elderly relative suddenly need your help? Caregiving responsibilities can descend upon us without warning. Or it could be we notice a gradual deteriorating or a series of small but unsettling mishaps as the normal aging process takes place. In either event, we may be called in to help out and if we have done some pre-planning the whole process can be a lot less stressful. Perhaps this is the time to make a change and do some advance planning for different possibilities you may face some day.



Have an open discussion of issues to find out what your parent's (or the elderly person's) wishes are while they are still capable. Be sure to involve all siblings in the discussions, even the ones who live a long distance away.

Be vigilant. Monitor your parents' situation by watching for subtle changes in their mental, physical, and emotional health.

Talk with your employer. Find out what the caregiver policies are and what options might be available should you need them. Would your workplace consider staggered hours, job sharing, a shorter work week, a temporary leave of absence, or the option to work from home?

Have the paperwork in order. Arrange to have power of attorney for personal care and property, as well as wills (including wishes for end-of-life care), financial information, keys, and contact information for friends and family readily available. You should also have a record of your parents' Social Insurance Numbers, medical insurance numbers, and contact information for medical insurance providers.

Get educated. Ask professionals for advice and assistance. If you have eldercare concerns, call the EFAP and enquire about a *Plan Smart Elder and Family Care Service*. A Human Solutions™ specialist will work with you to provide an immediate needs assessment and follow-up with customized information. Other resources available to you through your EFAP include the *Plan Smart Childcare and Parenting Support Services*, and online resources on managing stress, change management, resolving conflict in relationships, and effective parenting.

Keep in touch



We want your questions, comments, and suggestions.
E-mail us at changetohealth@humansolutions.ca.

For more information, to book a counselling session, or to access any of your EFAP services our Client Services Representatives are ready to speak with you 24 hours a day, seven days a week, in English or French. All calls are completely confidential.

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