

The “Sandwich” Generation

Does this sound like your typical day? You have to leave work early to take mom to the doctors, then must quickly take your son to soccer practice and at the same time pick up your daughter from band practice and then somehow squeeze in the time to get dinner for the family. If it does then you are part of the “Sandwich Generation.” No, we are not talking about a new pastrami sandwich on rye, but a new buzz word for caregivers known as the “Sandwich Generation”. These are caregivers who find themselves squeezed in between caring for younger loved ones such as children, and their elder parents or other elder family members. While the Sandwich Generation is not a new form of family caregiving, these caregivers are receiving a long overdue peaking of interest within American society.

The typical American Sandwich Generation Caregiver is in her mid-forties, married, employed and cares for her family and an elderly parent, usually her mother. With this said, it is important to note that there are more and more men that find themselves in a caregiving role. Please be aware that you are not alone, in fact more than 25% of American families are involved in some way with elder/parent care.

Are you experiencing some common stressors such as?

- How do I split my time between my family and my elder loved one?
- How do I find time for myself?
- How do I find the resources that I need for myself and my loved one?
- How can I get family and friends to help out?
- How much longer will my work allow me to leave early? Take time off?

To counter act some of these stressors, here are some tips that may help caregivers along the way:

Taking Care of Yourself

So many times I see caregivers who are run down and even sick because they have not taken time to care for themselves. Sure, no one can take care of your loved ones as well as you do, **but you must** care for yourself if you want to continue to care for your loved one and your family. This is not an act of selfishness; it is actually an act of great giving. Many caretakers feel guilty about taking time out for themselves, but you need to make own health and well-being a priority. Don't be afraid to delegate responsibilities to other family members whenever possible. Ask specifically for what you want.

Hold A Family Meeting

Caregiving is often a one-person show but it does not need to be if you have family support. Family meetings can be powerfully effective and healing for the caregivers and for the aging parent. It is one of the best ways to clarify family issues and to reach decisions by agreement or consensus. It's also an opportunity to give everyone a chance to share their feelings and ideas, and to become more involved. But most of all, it is a way to help build and strengthen the caregiver support systems. A good family

meeting can help members come away feeling more connected, energized, and supported.

Community Resources

Pick up that phone book and telephone to learn about options in your area. Don't try to do it all yourself. Most communities have ample resources for assisting Sandwich Generation families. From respite care to meal programs, get in touch with your local Area Agency on Aging, area nonprofit and government agencies and see what services are available to you and your family. Don't forget to ask your physician and church members. The internet is full of resources to assist you as well. Never be afraid to ask for assistance when you need to, you may be surprised at who has been waiting to help you.

The Eldercare Locator - 1-800-677-1116

Northwest Michigan Area Agency on Aging – 1-800-442-1713

Company benefits and policies and workplace strategies

Longer life spans coupled with an increase in dual- earner and single-parent households have left many employees juggling caregiving and professional responsibilities. The ability of American employers to help their employees meet their family commitments is essential to their long-term success. Below are some common tips, questions to think about and strategies to help with relieving some stress in your "other" job.

- Know what your company offers
- Know your company benefits
- Read related policy materials
- Talk to your human resources department
- *Learn about Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA)
- Use Employee Assistance Program (EAP) benefits

* FMLA entitles eligible workers a maximum of 12 weeks a year of unpaid leave without loss of job security or health benefits. There are a variety of restrictions such as company size and the amount of time the worker has been employed.

- Be open and honest and how much your supervisor needs to know about your situation.
- Be specific about what you need.
- Is flex time possible where your hours could be adjusted to come in at times other than those currently scheduled?
- Offer suggestions that will help your do your job but will allow you flexibility to meet your non-work demands.
- Ask about job sharing with another employee to cover times that you must be away.

Strategies That Work:

- Make a list of things that you need to do for your elder and/or your child.

- Honestly assess your job.
- Seek out others in your company about options that may have worked for them.
- Be proactive and creative.
- Make use of resources at work.
- Is your job description flexible to be rewritten for your current situation? If so work on a new one with your supervisor.
- Show your employer that you can be accommodating and use your lunch and break times to make phone calls or use other resources.
- If possible, try to schedule time off the job at the least disruptive times when your duties can be done another day or do not affect the work of others.
- Negotiate with others to cover each others' job, with the approval of your supervisor.
- Prioritize your list so that you can accomplish the most important tasks first. Break overwhelming tasks into a series of small steps.
- Communicate, communicate, communicate.

Final Word of Advice

Remember that this is difficult also for your parents. It's important to put yourself in the position of the person for whom you are caring. This person is experiencing a loss of independence and, perhaps, emotional issues involved with the need of now having a caregiver.