

The Sandwich Generation

Mother just called because she received a bill for over \$200 worth of jewelry she said she never received. Uncle Bill, who forgets his medicine, doesn't want any home health care worker to come in because he doesn't trust anyone in his house. Your son has just left his wife and needs a place for him and your beautiful little granddaughter to stay and your daughter needs a dress for her junior prom.

Do you feel squeezed between the demands of caring for your children and tending to the needs of aging parents and relatives?

Do you feel you are neglecting your own needs because of the demands family members have on you?

If so, you can consider yourself a member of the "Sandwich Generation." According to Carol Abaya, M. A., there are different sandwich categories you could fall into:

Traditional: those sandwiched between aging parents who need care and/or help and their own children.

Club Sandwich: those in their 50s or 60s sandwiched between aging parents, adult children and grandchildren. Or, those in their 30s and 40s, with young children, aging parents and grandparents.

Open Faced: anyone else involved in elder care.

Expectations

Just as you begin to feel you will have more time for yourself, these unrealized expectations can translate directly into disappointments, feelings of resentment, anxiety and stress. Many middle-years people expect to be free to plan for their own life only to realize that the parent-child role is changing to a child-parent role.

Uncertainty and Stress

The uncertainty of not knowing how long you will have to wait for "your time" or even if you get any at all can cause a great deal of stress. Being a member of the sandwich generation also causes worry about the loss of your own independence, and deciding what is the duty to your own children versus the duty to your parents. There is also worry about family finances and physical resources. Are you spreading yourself too thin?

Such stress can pile up and temper your genuine commitment to help family members in time of crisis or need.

Solutions for multi-generational households

There are solutions to the challenges and complexities if multi-generations are living in one household. Listed below are several possible solutions for a more meaningful and satisfying lifestyle:

1. Clarify the house rules. Include everything possible from eating schedules to cleanup responsibilities to living arrangements. Expect all to abide by the middle-generation's values.
2. Have a weekly family meeting. Insist that the lines of communication are open at all times.
3. Prepare a long-range financial plan. Work out a detailed plan about who is financially responsible for what. Keep detailed records and have a very specific budget.
4. Use available community programs and services. Contact your local or state agency on aging to find out about available programs. Many employers are recognizing the overload and offering services to the families.
5. Agree on a target date for departure for your young adults. Even if that date changes, it gives everyone parameters and an opportunity to bring up the subject.
6. Respects everyone's privacy. All generations should have their own lives, independent of each other. It is important to identify personal boundaries and personal space. All family members need to work on monitoring their feelings and behaviors.
7. Take care of your own family, your own marriage, and especially yourself. You aren't able to assist anyone if you are stressed, overburdened, or ill.

Don't forget to take care of yourself.

Caring for family members

- Most employers are mandated by the Family and Medical Leave Act to provide up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave to employees who need time off to take care of a family member or to tend to their own health problems.
- Look for resources that may assist you with your own special family issues.
- Check out local day care and find the one that is suited to your family needs.
- If caring for a parent or another elderly relative look for home health services, including nursing care, housecleaning and meal services. Adult day care centers may be another option.

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Sources:

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