

ELDERCARE AND THE “SANDWICH” GENERATION

If you find yourself caring for your children and your aging parents, then you are part of a growing number of people known as the “Sandwich” Generation. Today’s Baby Boomers - born between 1946 and 1965 - will likely spend more years caring for a parent than for their children.

Adding eldercare, to managing your own family and work, can make life especially demanding. According to Health Canada*, caregivers most likely to experience stress are those who had no choice in taking on this role, younger caregivers, those looking after a parent or spouse, and those performing a greater number of caregiving tasks.



10 Things You Can Do to Better Manage Your Role as a Caregiver...

1. Talk about difficult expectations

Often, a parent’s expectations may be different than yours. Consider some of these questions:

- Does your parent want to live with a family member or alone, or would a home for assisted living be more appropriate?
- Does your parent want to continue doing day-to-day activities or want help with them?
- How much time can you devote to the caregiving role?

2. How to know if your parents need help

They may have mobility problems, not remember things as easily, or have difficulty driving. Things to look for include: changes in daily routines; hygiene habits; sudden weight loss or gain; unexplained mood swings; bouts of forgetfulness; and expressions or displays of hopelessness and anxiety. Although we don't want to interfere with their desire to remain independent, how do we know when it's time to step in? Start with an assessment by an accredited and appropriate health care professional.

3. Talk to your parents about independence

Most parents welcome having this kind of discussion. It also helps you in enabling your parents to live the way they wish in the years ahead.

- Make a list of sensitive topics to discuss such as finances, transportation, and legal matters.
- Focus on their living environment by helping with everyday activities, getting around, health problems, their financial needs, and paying for their health care needs.

4. Be fiscally responsible

Does your parent have sufficient financial resources to cover the cost of various types of care - in-home, independent living facility, long-term care facility? Have you considered a long-term care insurance policy? Consider enlisting the services of a financial planner to create a plan that makes sense for you and your parents.

*Source: National Profile of Family Caregivers in Canada - 2002

5. Take care of legal responsibilities

Keep a file with all the legal information you will need later on. Work with an attorney who has expertise in eldercare. This may help to reduce the stress of dealing with your parents' personal affairs.

6. Seek community help

Sources include Social Services departments, the United Way, Meals on Wheels, senior centres, hospice care, support groups, full-time or part-time at-home care, adult day care or respite care centres, assisted living facilities, transportation services, and your employer. In Ontario, Community Care Access Centres are the point of entry for community-based health care services and for placement into a long-term care facility.

For more information, go to www.we.ccac-ont.ca or, in other provinces, contact the provincial department for health for this information.

7. Make home preparations

Evaluate and restructure your home to include basic accessibility features that support independent living. Use a safety checklist to help prevent injuries in the home.

For more information, go to www.safety-council.org/info/seniors/seniors.htm

8. Consider using a Personal Emergency Response System

This is a simple device worn by a person to call for help in emergencies. Encourage your parent to wear a medic alert bracelet to alert health care providers to allergies and special medications.

9. Maintain regular contact with their health care providers

Talking regularly with doctors, dentists, nurses, pharmacists, dietitians, social workers, and other health care providers is essential over the long-term to help make medical decisions and get the best results.

10. Prepare for long-distance caregiving

Many adult children must help from a distance when their older parents or relatives are in need of assistance. Here are some steps you can take to make this more manageable.

- Know their health care providers, medication needs, insurance information, and social security numbers.
- Identify who can assist (e.g. family, friends, clergy) and their telephone numbers and addresses.
- Watch for health or safety problems when you visit your parents.
- Involve your parents in assessing their own needs.
- Be sensitive and reassure your parents that the services will help them remain independent.

Final Thoughts...

Accept your limitations

Do what you reasonably can. It may not be easy, but don't be shy about asking for help from others. Delegate some responsibilities to other immediate or near-by family members as well as friends and neighbours. Also, seek guidance from professionals and talk to other caregivers.

Take care of yourself

In order to take care of others, you must be able to first take care of yourself and those of your immediate family, and not go broke in the process. Eat a healthy diet, try to get enough sleep, and find time for daily physical activity to help reduce stress and improve your health. Get regular medical checkups and discuss any symptoms of depression or illness you are having with your physician. Social contacts are important so stay in touch with your friends and continue to participate in social activities to keep you connected.

Plan for your own elder years

Discuss with a financial planner the steps to take to best prepare for retirement. Plan for your transportation needs. Update your driving skills. Ensure that you have regular health checkups co-ordinated through your family physician.

For information on how DCCI and the CAW support you in your eldercare responsibilities, contact your benefits representative.