



## EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

**Call our toll-free number 1-800-364-6352 for assistance.**

### **Worklife Services Newsletter May 2010**



#### **The Sandwich Generation**

If you're like many other caregivers, you're feeling pressured by the demands of doing everything at once caring for your elderly relative at the same time you're trying to raise your young children. If so, you are part of the "Sandwich Generation," a term that refers to working adults who care for both young and old family members.

Increasingly, employers are recognizing the pressures faced by the Sandwich Generation. Many large companies have Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) to help their employees find and take advantage of resources in the community that can help them with their many duties. If you're feeling stressed out, try talking with representatives from your company's EAP to see if you can get some help.

If you work at home, or if your employer does not have an EAP, look to other community resources such as your local Area Agency on Aging or childcare resource network for information about and help with elder care and child care.

Here are a few tips for dealing with the pressures of being a member of the Sandwich Generation.

### **Don't Try to Do It All**

You are not superman or superwoman; don't expect too much from yourself. Although you want to do the best that you can for both your children and your elder, it is completely natural that you place your own children and immediate family first on your list of priorities.

Don't compromise your role as a parent for the sake of your role as a caregiver for your elder. And don't be afraid to ask for help: look to home health services, nursing care, homemakers, home-delivered meals and other services to help you take care of your elder while also taking care of your own family.

### **Investigate Childcare/Adult care Options**

There are a wide variety of childcare/adult care options that can help ease the strain on you; find out what is available in your community. Check with your local childcare resource network for referrals and information about home-based daycares, larger daycare centers or nannies.

### **Flextime and Other Alternative Work Arrangements**

In an effort to recruit and maintain quality employees, more employers are becoming open to telecommuting and alternative work hours. You may want to discuss your situation with your boss or human resources department to see if there is a way to arrange your work responsibilities around the mounting responsibilities you face at home. You are not superman or superwoman; don't expect too much from yourself. Although you want to do the best that you can for both your children and your elder, it is completely natural that you place your own children and immediate family first on your list of priorities.

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## **Tips for Communicating Effectively With an Elder**

The normal physical changes of aging affect sight and hearing. Cognitive impairments, such as those caused by a stroke, dementia or other neurological conditions, also can alter a person's ability to communicate. It's important for caregivers to understand how to help when these changes take place.

### **Hearing Loss**

You may have noticed an older person who has trouble hearing your conversations. Many older adults experience a gradual hearing loss that affects their knowledge of what's going on around them, as well as their safety.

- Help your elder get a professional hearing test.
- Help your elder get a properly fitted hearing aid from a professional, if necessary.
- Choose a quiet place to speak directly to your elder. Ask if speaking louder or slower helps he or she understand you better.

### **Reduced Sight**

Changes in eyesight can be gradual or rapid. Since people use their eyes to gather information, the loss of sight can also change behavior. If you're caring for an elder with vision problems:

- Make sure eyeglass prescriptions are up-to-date.
- Get large-print reading materials.
- Try books on tape or other recorded materials.
- Give him or her a magnifying glass.
- Make sure rooms have adequate light.

### **Social Changes**

Older people with vision and hearing problems may avoid other people.

- Encourage them to socialize with others.
- Let your elder know how much you care about his or her ideas, advice and company.
- Reassure your elder that others care about him or her.
- Explain the person's hearing and sight limitations to friends and family members.



### **Cognitive Impairments**

People who have had strokes or those with Alzheimer's disease or other dementia may have trouble responding to normal conversation. If you take care of someone with such an impairment:

- Learn all you can about the person's condition from a healthcare provider.
- Be patient.
- Try to understand and accept the person's abilities.
- Be direct and use simple words.
- Comfort and reassure the person.



### **Planning Ahead for Elder Care**

Planning is a vital stage in the elder care process. Unless we devote some time to planning for the future, we will not be prepared for the difficult decisions that inevitably lie ahead.

Remember-no one can predict the future; things will happen that you have not predicted. Thus, perhaps the most important thing to do is to plan for the unpredictable. What is the worst that can happen? What will you do when or if it does?

If at all possible, involve your elders in the planning process. They can contribute to their own future, and will feel loved and valuable. This will also give you some idea of their

needs, wants and expectations for themselves and their lives.

Here are a few guidelines you can use in the planning stages.

### **Create a Support System**

A support system of relatives, friends, neighbors, medical professionals and clergy will make the inevitable ups and downs of the road ahead more manageable for all involved.

### **Get it in Writing**

Write down the goals and plans, as well as any other information that comes out of these early discussions. Timelines are helpful.

### **Establish Goals**

Work on deciding what needs to be done now, what will need to be done in the future and why. These goals can be financial, medical, nutritional or related to living arrangements- whatever you and those who need help decide is critical. A clear set of goals will be invaluable as you help to form a plan for care.

### **Organize**

Organize and prioritize all financial, medical and other important information so that all parties can access it easily and quickly.

### **Locate Resources**

Contact agencies that offer services and determine eligibility, timing, etc.

### **Research**

Spend time in the library, on the Internet and talking to professionals to understand all the aspects involved in elder care. Researching everything may seem to take a long time-but in the long run it will save time, as well as money and worry.

### **Understand Finances**

Agree beforehand on who will pay for what, when and how. Finances can be one of the most difficult subjects to discuss with an elderly relative, but they are also one of the most important. Whether or not you are granted power of attorney over that person's finances, you will most likely be helping to make some of the financial decisions.



Many working adults are faced with the question of whether to include an aging parent or another older relative in their household. If your relationship has been strained in the past, living together may not be the best plan. For people who have had a strong, loving connection with their parent or relative, the decision may be easier.

Even if you invite an elder to join your household, there are many practical and emotional issues to consider before making the change.

### **Sharing Your Home**

- Talk about your expectations, wishes and fears ahead of time.
- Will the older adult have trouble adjusting to your rules?
- How will the older person be included in family activities?
- Will you be able to find other living arrangements for your elder if the situation is no longer working?

### **Communication Styles**

- Do you and your elder have a way of sorting out differences?
- Does your elder's communication style mesh with the way your family resolves differences?

### **Care Requirements**

- How much care does your elder need?
- Does he or she need help with bathing, medicine and other types of personal care?
- Can other family members help?
- Does your community have home health services that provide transportation, nursing or personal care for older adults?
- Have you discussed long-term care arrangements?
- Does your employer's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or your local commission on aging provide information?

### **Physical Space**

- Can your elder walk up stairs or will a room on the main floor be needed?

- What arrangements can be made for added privacy?
- Will someone have to give up their room?
- Will you need to modify bathrooms, stairways or laundry areas for your elder's safety?
- Does the older person prefer a very cool or very warm environment?

### **Financial Considerations**

- What household expenses will increase?
- Can the older person contribute?
- Will a family member need to cut back on work hours, thereby decreasing income?
- Will there be financial advantages when the older person and family share expenses?

### **Social Activity**

- Once an elder moves in, plan time together and time apart.
- Encourage the older adult to see friends and participate in activities at an adult day care or senior center.
- Allow your elder to maintain a sense of dignity and privacy with a life of his or her own for as long as possible.

### **Making It Work**

- Your elder will benefit from the warmth of family care while your children will enjoy the perspective offered by an older adult.
- You'll reap the satisfaction of caring for an elder in his or her later years.

With good communication, planning and use of community resources, inviting a parent or elder to join your household can be a positive experience for all.