

Caught Between Generations: A Roadmap for the Challenges and Strategies of the Sandwich Generation

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In the ever-changing landscape of family dynamics and related demographics, a term has emerged in the last few years to describe a group of people who find themselves literally squeezed between the demands of caring for and planning for aging parents and supporting their own children: “The Sandwich Generation.” Personally, finding myself in this unique group, alongside many of my friends, we face numerous challenges and responsibilities, requiring us to balance our caregiving roles for our aging parents and our children while maintaining our own well-being.

In this article, we will delve into what the Sandwich Generation entails and offer insight into strategies for effectively managing these often-overwhelming responsibilities that characterize this unique phase of life.

What is the Sandwich Generation?:

The term “Sandwich Generation” refers to individuals who find themselves entwined in the middle of a generational “sandwich,” positioned between aging parents on one side and dependent (or semi-independent adult) children on the other. Those of us in the sandwich are literally stuck in between, managing both sides. Typically, the individuals who make up the Sandwich Generation are in their 40s to 60s, grappling with the dual responsibility of managing both ends of the generational spectrum. Still, with expanded life expectancy, varied family make-ups, and childbearing years stretching into the 5th decade, age alone does not define membership. The crux of what characterizes the Sandwich Generation is the *simultaneous* responsibility of providing care and support to both older and younger family members.

Challenges The Sandwich Generation Faces:

1. **Financial:** Navigating the dual responsibilities of supporting both aging parents and children can impose a significant financial burden. From medical expenses and long-term care costs for aging parents to education and upbringing expenses for children, the financial strain can be overwhelming. The strain is exacerbated by the fact that many aging parents do not have the resources or the forethought to plan for the cost of care properly. Consequently, the onus falls to their adult children, the Sandwich Generation, to solve via their own financial means or provide the required care for their aging parents personally.
2. **Time:** Members of the Sandwich Generation often find themselves juggling multiple roles and responsibilities. The delicate balance between the demands of caregiving, coupled with professional commitments and personal obligations, can lead to an intense time crunch, resulting in stress and guaranteed burnout. There are simply not enough hours in the day to help everyone in the way they need help.
3. **Emotional:** Navigating the simultaneous care of aging parents and raising children can be emotionally taxing. Witnessing the decline of one's parents while safeguarding the well-being of one's children can lead to a cascade of feelings, including guilt, anxiety, depression, and emotional exhaustion. Throw in the addition of complicated relationships with

those aging parents and siblings who have differing opinions on how one's aging parents should be cared for, and it can be a recipe for emotional disaster.

4. **Lack of Support:** Individuals grappling with Sandwich Generation challenges often experience a lack of support and resources tailored to their unique circumstances. Family members do not always live geographically near others, which can lead to feelings of resentment for those who can't be there physically to offer support. Even worse is when family members are within close geographical proximity and still do not offer support, burdening one family member with the overwhelming responsibility of "doing it all."

Strategies for the Sandwich Generation:

1. **Foster Open Communication:** Talk about it! It is crucial that you foster open and honest communication with your family members. Discuss your caregiving responsibilities and the areas where you need assistance with your spouse or partner, your children, and your parents. Ensuring everyone is aware of the challenges you face in providing care can help set realistic expectations and build a support network within your family.
2. **Seek External Support:** The time to reach out for help is now! Whether the support is found in your community resources, support groups, or organizations that cater to the needs of the Sandwich Generation, external support is vital. It might be helpful to keep in mind that the community and support groups are free. Connecting with others facing similar challenges in the Sandwich Generation can provide insight, solutions, advice, practical assistance, exchange of information, or just an old-fashioned vent session.
3. **Prioritize Self-Care:** We all know the anecdote that plane passengers hear at the start of every flight: put on your own oxygen mask first, and only then can you help others. This old adage is something easier said than done. The bottom line is that caring for others begins with caring for yourself. As a member of the Sandwich Generation, make it a priority to engage in self-care activities such as exercise, pursuing your favorite hobbies, and even practicing relaxation techniques. Maintaining your physical and mental well-being is essential to effectively providing care to those around you. Remember, you cannot effectively care for others if you are running on empty.
4. **Holistic Financial and Elder Care Planning:** Work with a financial advisor, an elder law attorney, and a geriatric care manager to develop a comprehensive plan that considers the financial, legal, and emotional needs of both your parents and children. Explore potential benefits, government programs, legal documents, and long-term care options to alleviate the financial and legal strain. The time to plan is now.
5. **Delegation is Key:** You simply cannot do it all. Do your best to identify tasks that can be delegated or shared among family members, friends, or hired professionals like those mentioned in number 4 above. You can even involve your children in age-appropriate caregiving responsibilities to assist their grandparents or take away some of your burdens so that your attention can turn to your aging parents. Do not hesitate to seek assistance from your siblings or other relatives to distribute the workload more evenly. Embracing delegation is crucial for maintaining balance and effectiveness in your caregiving role.
6. **Embrace the Power of Technology:** Utilize technology to streamline caregiving tasks. Explore online scheduling tools, medication reminders, and telehealth services. Embracing technology can help save time, reduce stress, and improve efficiency in managing both your aging parents' and your child's care. Leverage technology to empower those far-away family members to contribute to caregiving by paying bills remotely, scheduling doctor appointments, or even ordering groceries online. Embracing technology ensures a more streamlined and collaborative approach to managing the care of both your aging parents and your children.

For those of us who know, being a member of the Sandwich Generation can present numerous challenges. Still, navigating these responsibilities successfully with the right strategies and support is possible. The key is finding a balance between caregiving roles and your own well-being. While the role remains challenging, no matter how many solutions are identified, it is possible to thrive while supporting both the older and younger generations in your family. Click [here](#) to listen to my podcast, [The Sandwich Generation Survival Guide](#).