

Holiday Harmony for the Sandwich Generation: Boundaries, Delegation, and Self-Care

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The holidays arrive each year with that familiar blend of anticipation, nostalgia, and — if we are being honest — a fair amount of anxiety. For members of the Sandwich Generation, that pressure can feel magnified. You are balancing end-of-year school events, office deadlines, holiday parties, travel plans, gift lists, and meal planning while simultaneously managing the medical appointments, emotional needs, and household logistics of aging parents. The season that promises joy often demands more than anyone can give.

In the middle of it all, I, like most people, find myself longing for the simpler holidays of childhood, when someone else did the worrying. Yet here we are, stuck in the middle, holding together the needs of multiple generations. If this is your role, you are not failing when it feels overwhelming. You are doing complex emotional and logistical work, and the holidays simply spotlight that reality.

This is precisely why remembering three core principles — boundaries, delegation, and self-care — is not just helpful, but essential. These are not indulgences or luxuries, they are survival skills.

Boundary-Setting: A Gift to Yourself and Everyone Else

The holidays tend to activate our instinct to say “yes”: yes to hosting, yes to attending, yes to keeping every tradition alive. Sandwich Generation members feel even more pressure during the holiday season, as they often operate with already limited bandwidth. Without firm and healthy boundaries, the season can shift quickly from meaningful to unmanageable.

Setting boundaries does not make you less generous or less committed to your family; it can mean the difference between sustainable and not. When you clearly identify what you can realistically handle — whether that means declining to host this year, catering instead of cooking, limiting travel, or being upfront about needing to leave an event early — you are honoring your own humanity and limitations. Boundaries also spare your loved ones the silent resentment, not-so-silent commentary, or exhaustion that builds when you push beyond your limits.

If set up properly, boundaries can actually improve relationships: they create predictability, reduce friction, and allow you to remain emotionally present. Saying “no” or “not this year” is not a rejection of a person or tradition; it is an act of respect for your energy, your time, and your wellbeing.

Delegation: Letting Others Step Into Their Roles

Many Sandwich Generation caregivers take pride in being the one who manages everything. This “can do” attitude is essential on many days and certainly comes from a good place. Trying to do all things generally reflects a desire to protect, shepherd, and smooth the path for those who rely on you. But during the holidays, the instinct to take on everything can often become

unsustainable. Delegation becomes not merely practical, but vital.

And despite what many fear, delegation is not a sign that you are incapable or weak. It is a sign that you recognize the importance of shared responsibility. Whether it means asking siblings to manage a parent's appointment, inviting older children to take over part of the holiday meal, hiring someone to help with errands, or letting a friend wrap gifts, delegation strengthens your support system.

Almost equally important, delegation also allows others to feel invested and helpful: family members and friends often want to contribute but simply do not know how. When you provide concrete tasks, you offer them a pathway to meaningful participation. You are also creating space for your own rest, which ultimately benefits everyone around you.

Self-Care: The Foundation That Holds It All Together

Pop culture often portrays self-care during the holidays as lighting a candle as you sink into a beautifully drawn bath larger than a bedroom or escaping to a snowy holiday getaway in a picturesque New England village. And while these images reflect the perfect picture, true self-care for the Sandwich Generation often runs deeper and less ideal. Images of self-care instead should be reframed to reclaim the internal resources the season tends to drain.

Self-care can be simple: scheduling a quiet hour early in the morning before anyone else wakes up, maintaining your own medical appointments rather than postponing them to accommodate others, stepping outside for a walk, closing your office door for an hour, and giving yourself permission not to attend every gathering.

Most importantly, self-care is not something you *earn* only when everything else is done. It is a non-negotiable part of ensuring you can keep caring for the people who depend on you. Neglecting yourself does not make you more devoted; it makes you depleted. When you protect your own emotional and physical well-being, you are building the resilience the holidays demand and ensuring that you can keep going when the holiday chaos is over.

Finding Your Own Pace in a Season of Expectations

Being a member of the Sandwich Generation during the holidays means carrying the weight of competing needs — your desire to ensure a magical holiday season for your children and your parents' needs for care and stability, all while trying to maintain your own sense of center. It is no small task. And yet, with boundaries, delegation, and self-care, you can consciously shape a season that honors both your family and yourself.

This year, allow yourself to rewrite some of the holiday scripts. Create new traditions that fit the realities of your life now. Let go of unnecessary pressure and focus on presence instead of perfection. It is possible to protect your energy, share the load, and still create a meaningful season for multiple generations — without losing yourself in the process.

The holidays will always be full, but they do not have to deplete you physically and emotionally. By embracing these three principles, permit yourself to experience the season with the steadiness, clarity, and compassion you deserve.