

Supporting the Supporters: The Sandwich Generation

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Caring for aging parents while raising a family can be challenging. As their child, you feel pressure to care for aging parents, and as a parent, you feel the obligation to tend to your family. As a caregiver, you may feel like you're being squeezed on both ends, like an uncomfortable sandwich.

"Sandwich generation" refers to those individuals who have parents ages 65 or older and are raising a family, including supporting children over the age of 18. The Pew Research Center found **more than half** (54%) of adults in their 40s are in the sandwich generation. And about one in five middle-aged adults provide financial support to both an aging parent and a child.

According to a few nationwide studies conducted by The Pew Research Center, the sandwich generation population hasn't necessarily skyrocketed over recent years, but the amount of money they spend on dependents has grown. Being in this position can not only drain your pocketbook, but it can also whittle away at your mental wellbeing.

Mounting pressure to be a provider and source of stability can be taxing. Caregivers can feel overextended, overwhelmed, and underappreciated, making it vital that while you are taking care of others, you also find the time to take care of yourself. **Use these tips from Mental Health First Aid to begin practicing self-care today:**

Get enough sleep. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that nearly 40% of caregivers report getting insufficient sleep, which can affect your health and ability to provide care. Adults need at least seven hours of sleep every night, so keep your bedtime consistent.

Take stock of your responsibilities. You may wake up one day and realize the sheer volume of responsibilities you have in your life. Were they always there? Probably not. Caregivers often find responsibilities slowly add up over time. What used to be checking on your parents a few times a month may have turned into once a week or once a day. Kids may be involved in one sport at the beginning of the school year and signed up for every extracurricular activity available by the end of it. Write down daily and monthly routines to see which can be cut and which can be kept. Balance and boundaries are essential.

Meet needs, not fairness. It's easy to feel like you need to exert the same amount of time and effort for every dependent in your life. But you'll quickly empty your cup and fill your day. Instead, focus on people's actual needs. For example, an older person may only need your company at dinner, while a child will need dinner prepared, served and cleaned up. Eliminate any guilt about not spending equal amounts of time and energy on everyone every day, and remember you are doing your best.

Ask for help. There may be a point when you need to reach out for assistance. This can look like a long-term care facility for a parent, a housekeeping service for you or your parents, or a counselor or therapist for yourself. Taking care of yourself is a form of self-care that will give you some grace and space to meet your needs, too.

