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YOU AND YOUR SPOUSE HAVE FULFILLING CAREERS. You have three children ranging in age from 12-17. You talk about your empty-nest plans constantly and then you get the call that changes your life – your mother has had a stroke and now has limited abilities to care for herself.

It is now your responsibility to care for your mother while caring for your children. Welcome to the “sandwich generation”! You are “sandwiched” between two generations that rely on you for care. The sandwich would be just two pieces of bread without you – the main ingredient – the caregiver.

AARP defines the sandwich generation as those age 45 to 55 who have aging parents as well as children under 21. According to a 2001 national survey, this encompasses 44% of the U.S. population. In fact, the elderly population continues to rise. The Administration on Aging reported that the older population, persons 65 years or older, totaled 35.6 million in 2002. They represented 12.3% of the U.S. population, about one in every eight Americans. It is a fact - more and more of us are going to have this extra responsibility.

SO WHAT IMPACT COULD THIS HAVE ON YOU AND YOUR FAMILY?

Imagine having to care for your young children. You cook their meals, assist with their homework, attend their school functions, and transport them to practices, along with every other duty deemed appropriate for fostering our children. Then you suddenly have a parent that is no longer independent, but someone who you care for either at their own home, in your home, or in an eldercare facility. Along with having to make the stressful decision of where your parent lives, your weekly activities increase exponentially. You are now going to additional doctor’s appointments, paying extra bills, and managing your parent’s overall care.

According to the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging, caregivers dedicate, on average, 20 hours per week to provide care for older persons.

TIME FOR YOU BECOMES A FANTASY. According to “The Sandwich Generation: A Cluttered Nest” by Herbert G. Lingren and Jayne Decker, people of the sandwich generation also worry about the loss of their own independence and their

duty to their own children versus their duty to their parents. They worry about their family’s financial and physical resources, spreading themselves too thinly across too many roles and their own coping skills in the face of the complex situations that confront them.

But what choice does a person have? You love your parent as you do your children. Your parents sacrificed and cared for you, so you want to provide the same love and care for them. Yet, it is difficult being everything to all people. Fortunately, resources and assistance programs are available. You do not have to take the burden on alone. You do, however, have to consider the best living arrangement for your parent.



RESOURCES FOR HELPING WITH ELDERCARE

Start with The National Association of Area Agencies on Aging – www.n4a.org. This organization helps you find your local Area Agency on Aging. For the North Texas area, it is the North Central Texas Area Agency on Aging under the umbrella of North Central Texas Council of Government www.nctcog.org. More local to the Frisco area, the Collin County Committee on Aging, Inc. www.cccoaweb.org and SPAN, Inc. www.span-transit.org, not only provide resources, but also coordinate delivering meals and other care.

three generations: an evolving twist

by auralie ruggiere

The Collin County Committee on Aging, for example, has a list of resources for caregivers, such as caregiver training, survival guides, information about caring from a long distance and a section titled, Because We Care: A Guide for People Who Care written by agency employees who are in a care giving situation.

An apparent bit of advice offered in this care-giving guide is, ask for help and be specific about the type of help you need.

As the baby boomers age, this dilemma will become more prevalent and the resources more necessary. Becoming aware of the services and agencies prior to a life changing call may ease the transition of responsibility when caring for an elderly parent.

Auralie Ruggiere is a freelance writer living in Corinth, TX.