



# EAP News

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## Eldercare: Challenges and Rewards

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*Susan is a busy 46 year old woman, working fulltime shifts as a nurse at a local hospital as well as managing a household that includes two teenage boys, a husband in sales who frequently has to travel as well as a dog and two guinea pigs! She had been coping pretty well until her 82 year old father recently had a stroke. Her parents are still living in their own home so while her father is in the hospital, Susan has been helping out with her mother who doesn't drive. Her older sister is in Vancouver and while she came right after the stroke to help, she had to return to her own job and family after a few weeks. Susan is rushed and overwhelmed a lot of the time and finds herself sometimes being impatient at work and with her children. She is not sleeping well and finds it hard to relax when she does get a few moments to herself. There seems to be no end in sight –if her father doesn't make a full recovery then placement in a nursing home may have to be an option.*

Susan could be any one of us in “the sandwich generation” – caught in the middle between growing families who still need us and aging parents who may need our help as well. Better health care has increased life expectancy and the number of middle aged couples with two or more living parents has risen from 1:10 to 1:2 over the last century. The reality is that adult children are being called upon to assume greater “parenting” functions for elderly relatives: this can include assistance with transportation, shelter, food, companionship and financial help.

Most people are willing to do whatever they can to assist their parents or elderly relatives but sometimes there are unresolved issues from childhood which may complicate the situation and make communication more difficult. Also the subjects of death and dying are still considered taboo in our society and our parents' physical and mental

deterioration may remind us of our own mortality. Add to the mix the hectic pace of modern life and this can often be a recipe for stress and burnout on the part of the caregiver. Self care is an important component for dealing with such a potent mix. The best place to start is with your attitude – define your role as a helper so that you can have realistic goals and feel effective in the help you are able to give. Getting social supports and services involved as well as other family members is key, as is some time for exercise and relaxation.

### Here are some coping strategies:

**Create a Plan of Action.** Sit down with the entire family and discuss the future frankly. Hammer out a long-term plan that clearly lays out each family member's responsibilities. If educational and elder care costs are causing you stress, try drawing up a detailed budget to ease your anxiety. Ways to ask for help:

**Prepare a list of chores and activities** that you do on a daily and weekly basis. At the next family meeting, pass the list out. Chances are your family will be astonished by all of the things you take care of: it's easy to overlook work and take others' efforts for granted if they're not pointed out.

**Discuss your duties with family members** and ask each person to take on a few tasks they're interested in. Don't go for an even split of responsibilities at first since your family will probably feel overwhelmed in the beginning.

**Create a schedule that assigns tasks** to older children, your partner and your parents. Get everyone to participate as much as they can to reduce your load.

**Don't assume your family will naturally know how to do particular tasks.** Explain the tasks to them, what is involved and the end result you are seeking.

**Don't expect perfection.** Remember that each person has a different way of doing things and different standards. Support and praise efforts made by family members to help you.

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### Remember...

It's easy to contact EAP! Just call **549-5561**  
or toll free **1-888-409-4499**.

Also the 24/7 After Hours Emergency  
toll free number **1-800-668-9920** gives you direct  
access to a professional counsellor.





**Accept that you'll have good days and bad.** Frustration, stress and guilt are well-known to the sandwich generation. So too are optimism, joy and love. Waves of both are natural. If you're overwhelmed by negative feelings, don't bottle them up. Talk to a close friend, spouse, join an elder care support group or consult with your Family Services EAP to help you cope.

**Include your elderly parents in decision-making and respect their need for independence.** Let your parents do what they are able to for as long as they can. It's important to help them maintain their dignity, especially when their health and abilities begin to deteriorate. Reinforce your love and support for them every day.

**Seek the additional support of a counsellor** if you're feeling stressed and unable to cope. He or she can provide valuable insight into your situation and work with you to create solutions that can help you care for your family without losing yourself.

**Look after yourself.** Many sandwichers put themselves at the bottom of the priority list. Doing this can jeopardize your physical and mental health and leave you too ill or stressed to help other family members. Put yourself on the agenda. Indulge in your favourite pastimes and weave them into your daily or weekly routine.

**Listen to your favourite music or radio talk show** while you're driving, working or doing household chores.

**Take advantage of the waiting room.** Catch up on your reading or puzzle yourself with a crossword while you are waiting for kids or parents at the doctor's office.

**Deal with one task at a time** regardless of how busy you are. Committing to each task in a focused way will ease the feeling of being overwhelmed by an endless number of tasks.

A good place to start for assistance with the elderly is your local Community Care Access Centre. For Kingston, Frontenac and Lennox & Addington go to [www.kflaccac.ca](http://www.kflaccac.ca) ; for Hastings & P.E. go to [www.hpeccac.on.ca](http://www.hpeccac.on.ca) ; for Lanark, Leeds & Grenville go to [www.llg.ccac-ont.ca](http://www.llg.ccac-ont.ca) ; for Peterborough go to [www.peterborough.ccac-ont.ca](http://www.peterborough.ccac-ont.ca) The national web site is [www.thecareguide.com](http://www.thecareguide.com) .

## Empty Nest...Refilled

Mary Huntley, Credit Counsellor

Aging parents used to wonder and worry how they would cope with their "empty nest". Children almost always married and set up house or got a job and an apartment. An adult child living at home was unusual, strange even. Well, like everything else, times change!

With companies closing left and right, there is less job security than in the past. Rising gas prices and the skyrocketing cost of utilities often delay adult children from living independently or result in their having to give up rental accommodation and move home. Even married couples are living with parents until they can afford a place of their own.

This situation can be beneficial to both but the ground rules have to be clear BEFORE they move in. Consider a written agreement signed by all parties. You were obligated to support your children for 18 years. If they move home when they are 25, or 30, or any age...you are doing them a favour and they should pull their weight.

One approach is monthly rent. Decide on an amount that is reasonable for both of you. Take into consideration what they would pay if they were sharing with a friend. Make it clear that this is first priority, just like paying a landlord. Unexpected bills for other expenses are their obligation and not to be deducted from your rent. If they didn't pay their landlord, they would be evicted...you are the landlord.

Another method, a division of costs, where you pay the utilities and your child buys all the groceries and covers the cable bill and household supplies. Make them responsible for the physical work you would otherwise pay someone to do, like cutting grass and shoveling snow. Again, consider a written agreement of responsibilities.

It will be very clear if your child isn't holding up their end of the bargain...empty fridge equals lack of respect for your arrangement! Snow piled to the roof equals broken promise! Regardless of the agreement you make, remember that you are two adults sharing a home. Don't let your relationship revert back to parent and child.

Even the grown children can think that their parents are "made of money". If money is tight, or comfortable but not excessive, consider showing them your budget. The figures don't lie. The cost of maintaining a household can be very surprising if you've never tried to manage one on your own or didn't manage to live on your own successfully. The budget will show them how their contribution is needed in a shared situation.

Who knows? It may also earn you the long neglected admiration for managing to support a family for as long as you did!

