Getting rid of guilt: balancing your parenting responsibilities

Do you feel guilty for not devoting as much time as you'd like to your children and/or an older family member because of conflicting responsibilities? You're not alone. As employees, parents and caregivers, we are often pulled in more directions than we can handle.



Understanding guilt

When younger children are upset, we wonder if lack of quality time is to blame. Older children often articulate a desire for more time and attention, confirming our fears. When conflicts force us to miss a commitment made to older relatives, we similarly feel the guilt rushing in. Try to understand that much of this guilt is coming from unrealistic expectations and standards, and doesn't reflect any real failure to meet responsibilities.

Guilt can be beneficial if it prompts you to find solutions. After all, feeling guilty means you care. Acknowledge the challenges you face, such as:

- Conflicts between the needs of children and an older relative
- Conflicts with job-related responsibilities
- Conflicts with our own needs for personal time and relaxation
- Conflicts regarding the needs of a partner
- Illness of a child, an older relative or other caregivers can create emergency care problems
- School and medical appointments are invariably scheduled during your own working hours
- Personal illness and stress
- Financial costs of additional caregivers
- Feelings of isolation and helplessness when problems arise
- Legal/ethical issues of elder care—power of attorney, substitute decision making, etc.

Develop coping strategies

To address your situation, begin by asking yourself what you can do to change the situation. Be realistic. If you have to work, you have to accept you are a working caregiver. And be sure to pace yourself; set limits and recognize that you can't do everything.

If you are simply unable to spend as much time as you'd like with your children or older relatives, you may need to let go of guilt and adjust your expectations.

Don't be too hard on yourself. If you feel that you've let your family down or made a wrong decision, look upon it as a learning opportunity for the future. Remember that none of us are perfect parents or perfect family members.

Get organized

In order to maintain your roles and responsibilities—as well as your sanity—here are some tips to get you back on track:

- Set priorities and make realistic goals.
- Maintain a family calendar of all the family members' activities and appointments.
- Keep a record of the details of your older relative's medical appointments and medications.
- Enlist help—paid or otherwise—for household chores, cleaning the house, mowing the lawn, grocery shopping, etc.
- Have a backup caregiver on hand in case of illness.
- Learn from others in the same situation. Join a support group for caregivers.

- Try to make time for a hobby or favourite sport, even if it's just for an hour or two a week.
- Maintain friendships. Make arrangements to meet up with friends at least once a week.

Though you may be overwhelmed by the roles and responsibilities that come with being a parent and caregiver, coping techniques are available. Amid it all, be sure to take care of your own well-being and make time for yourself. And don’t be afraid to ask for help from family and friends.