Sandwich generation or stress generation? How to manage it all!

In today's world, it has become more and more common for people to be met with a double bind: caring for their children and their parents or grandparents at the same time. This so called 'sandwich' effect can easily amount to added stress. When you are looking after your children and your parents, you are not only facing additional practical matters of care such as financial obligations and time management, but also added emotional pressures that can lead to fatigue and burnout. Reality is reality, and while you can't control when you'll be called upon to care for your family, you can take care of yourself in the midst of it to prevent emotional pitfalls. Here are some ways you can find balance in the middle of this sandwich.



Plan and communicate

Often times, things can go wrong when there isn't a plan and when communication is lacking. When caring for multiple generations, it is unwise to assume anything will just "take care of itself". It may seem like a good idea to protect either generation from the reality that caring for them is an effort, however being clear and honest is best and it doesn't need to be hurtful. Sit down with the whole family and discuss the practical realities of your shared future, and create a plan that details every family member's roles and obligations.

Prioritize self-care

As with all potentially stressful life events, when you are taking care of someone it can be easy to neglect your own needs. It is of utmost importance that you make time for self-care - activities that restore and rejuvenate you. These are different for everybody but often include reading, going for walks, taking baths, spending time with friends, or going to a yoga class.

Make use of resources

Look into support programs in your area. You will likely find a host of programs for older adults that can help you take care of your aging relatives. Similarly, you may find organized groups or online forums where others that are in the same situation as you and your family go to exchange ideas, advice, and general support. Take advantage of what's out there!

Accept the bad, embrace the good

Bad days will exist, where you will feel overwhelmed, underappreciated or just plain tired. Accept these and know that they will pass. Just as important is to recognize good days and moments, when you feel loved and compassionate towards your family and extended family. Knowing that some days will be better than others can help you take it easy on yourself when the going gets tough.

Reach out for help

When it feels like too much, seek help. This could mean asking someone to take over some of your regular chores for a day or a week, or seeing a counsellor if you feel like the emotional tolls of double-ended care are

becoming more than you can tolerate by yourself. Don’t be afraid to ask for help, embrace your ability to recognize when you need it.