



Balancing Work, Family, and Caregiving

Caregivers must often balance the demands of family, work, community groups and the elder. As an employee, parent, spouse and/or grandparent, as well as caregiver, you feel pulled in many different directions. It may be hard to do everything others want you to do.

Employed Caregivers

On the average, caregivers who work outside the home spend more hours each week caring for an older adult family member who lives with them than they spend at their job. If there are children at home, there are even more family and work duties. Caregivers must often give up time spent on hobbies, social and family activities, and sometimes even outside work to care for an elder.

As an employed caregiver, you may lose time from work, come in late, take unscheduled time off from work, or lose benefits. You might lose pension credits or opportunities for advancement because you decide to work part-time. You may have to change to a job that has fewer demands and lower pay because of the added responsibilities of caregiving.



Depending on your finances, career goals and relationship with the older adult, you may have to choose whether to continue working or become a full-time caregiver. Physical and emotional demands may result in stress-related problems and less satisfaction with working and caregiving. Many employees caring for the elderly have not had a vacation from caregiving for a year or more.

Ways to Balance Your Time

Set priorities. Decide what is important, less important and in-between. You may need to say "no" even if it might disappoint others. Set priorities for your own needs, family needs, job needs and the older person's needs. You may have to limit community service until you have fewer demands on your time. Priorities will change from day to day and week to week, but a ranked list will help set priorities for you.

Schedule separate time for the older person and your family. Everyone should know which time is theirs. For older persons living out of town, you might spend a week or weekend every month with them, depending on their condition.

Schedule a telephone hour at work. This might be during lunch, when the older person, family or doctors may call you.

Rearrange commitments creatively. Schedule appointments and errands to make the most of your time.

Invest time or money in things that will help you manage tasks. Consider using a computer, bookkeeper, housekeeper or community resources.

Arrange with your employer to make up time away from the office. Try to set up a flexible schedule if your family demands seem to be too much.

Meet with other caregivers and self-help groups for support. Sharing eases tension, gives a new view of the situation, increases understanding and builds support. Support groups help you feel less alone. They give you a chance to share what you have learned.

Accept your limitations. Get help from another family member, a neighbor or community services when you need to take a break. What will you give up that will make life easier for you? Perhaps it is membership in a club that doesn't interest you anymore or a committee that you have served on for a long time.

Make time for yourself. Set aside time on a regular basis to be alone, take a walk, exercise or just have quiet time, even for a short period. You will be more productive, have more energy and know yourself better. The person you care for will also benefit when you take time to renew yourself. Take time to be with friends or to do things that you enjoy. This will help you be a more relaxed caregiver and prevent you from "burning out."

Keep good records. Caregiving requires the use of many services. Working with service providers, insurance companies and others is often confusing and time-consuming. Keep track of contacts and information. Avoid over-relying on your memory. Make notes as you talk in person or over the telephone. Keep brochures and other information provided by organizations and agencies. Keep copies of letters you write regarding services, as well as those you receive. Ask lots of questions. No question is a dumb one. Clip and file articles about services you may need.

Coping with Three Generations Under One Roof: Some "Ground Rules" for Harmony

Most older people prefer to live in their own homes or apartments. They fear being a burden to their children. There are, however, times when an elderly parent and his or her adult child share living quarters, by choice or necessity. This will affect you, as well as your family. Here are some suggestions for making a cooperative living arrangement work well.

- ✓ Involve your spouse in planning.
- ✓ Respect your spouse's need for privacy and for time alone with you. Keep in touch with each other.
- ✓ Discuss your expectations of your spouse's involvement as a caregiver. Solve problems together.
- ✓ Make a space where your spouse can pursue independent interests without distractions or interruptions.
- ✓ Keep records and receipts of special expenditures involving the arrangement.
- ✓ Discuss planned costs.
- ✓ Maintain social contact and outside activities as a couple.
- ✓ Be cheerful and stay interested in your spouse's activities.
- ✓ Kids will be kids.

- ✓ Involve your children in planning for any changes.
- ✓ Create a list of "courtesies" for them to observe; explain why these are important.
- ✓ Set an example. Loud music or other youthful pursuits should be moderate for the comfort of others.
- ✓ Encourage them to join in family tasks that involve the elder. Foster inter-generational sharing.
- ✓ Allow for slip-ups; discuss special circumstances and limits. Remind children that you once lived in your parent's home.
- ✓ Respect privacy.
- ✓ Allow for time-out.
- ✓ Cooperative Senior
- ✓ Respect the privacy of family members. Don't interfere.
- ✓ Be considerate when you use the telephone.
- ✓ Don't criticize housekeeping, cooking, spouse, friends, children, clothes, TV programs or church.
- ✓ Discuss problems calmly.
- ✓ Be friendly to children. Take the first step to resolve conflicts.
- ✓ Offer to help, but don't force your way of doing something.
- ✓ Keep a sense of humor. Don't inflict guilt.
- ✓ Help with expenses. Pay as much of your way as you can.
- ✓ Set goals for yourself. Associate with friends.
- ✓ Maintain appearance and hygiene.

Source: Adapted from Caregiver Connection, Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service.

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