



## Caregiver's Answers, Topics, and Helpful Information

In an effort to continually assist caregivers in their search for pertinent information regarding eldercare, our Family Caregiver Support Coordinator addresses topics of most frequently asked questions via Caregiver's Answers, Topics and Helpful Information (**CATHI**). Additionally, caregivers are also invited to e-mail individual questions to the Family Caregiver Support Coordinator at [caregiver2@senior-resources-guilford.org](mailto:caregiver2@senior-resources-guilford.org).

### **The Many Sides of Caregiving: Handling the Guilt**

There are many stresses in the relationship between adult children and their aging parents, but one of the greatest of these stresses is the day-to-day responsibilities of caregiving. Providing things such as: food, shelter, clothing, transportation and companionship, as well as serving as financial manager and counsel has become commonplace for many adult children.

Many also have several other responsibilities as well: to their spouses or significant other and to their own children, to their place of employment, to their social or church affiliated groups and to their friends. Caregivers are often trying to give equal time and consideration to all who want their time and attention, with little time and consideration left for their own health and welfare. Keeping up at this pace can compromise a caregiver's patience and ability to cope with daily life.

Is it any wonder that people in this "Sandwich Generation" cry out "What's left for me?" and "How can I satisfy everybody?" **The answer is - YOU CAN'T!**

There are many feelings and emotions that stem from this constant stress of serving as the main caregiver. These include: frustration, anger, resentment, inadequacy and guilt. Why are adult children full of these feelings, particularly guilt? They often ask the following questions:

- Am I doing the right thing - have I explored all the options available?

- They took care of me, why can't I take care of them now when they need me the most?
- Am I weak/incompetent/selfish?
- If I don't devote all my time and energy to Mom or Dad, will I be a bad "child"?

Adult children who feel guilt manifest this feeling by being complaining, offensive or accusatory, overprotective and either visit too often, or not often enough. They often also feel that unless they can return total care to their aging parent, they are not doing enough. This is especially true if there is only one adult child who has the full burden placed on them, or the one of the "bunch," most often a daughter or the child who lives the closest geographically to the parent, who assumes the burden of care.

What can you do, then, to relieve the guilt that arises when you have all this demand on your time? When you realize that things are reaching a breaking point, arrange for a family meeting, which includes your aging parents, any siblings, your spouse or significant other and your children. You may want a professional or "third party" to participate and help facilitate the conversation. It is important here to recognize that there are many instances where the main caregiver refuses to acknowledge that they can't handle the load— they are too caught up in the daily grind that they don't recognize the warning signals (extreme fatigue, lack of rest, irritability, frustration over lack of time, among others). A professional, outside perspective in this case would be beneficial to objectively point out the potential dangers of trying to do everything for everyone without a break.

Another tip is to negotiate from the start just exactly what the roles will be in terms of providing care for an older relative. Ask for and involve outside agency help to get occasional respite. If your parent is resistant in accepting outside help, demanding that you do the job, be FIRM in expressing that you must look out for your own needs. If you don't, you will eventually wear yourself down to the point where you are no longer effective as the main caregiver. You should not feel guilt in insisting that you take time out for yourself. Remember to follow through on your plan for getting respite relief—you deserve it!

With older adults living longer, many adult children are faced with the prospect of being a caregiver for a significant number of years. It is important for adult children to recognize that, in many cases, they will never satisfy or completely fulfill their obligations to their parents, no matter how hard they try. Many try to seek parental approval by giving up all their other needs and responsibilities to care for that parent before that parent dies.

For many, there are unresolved issues between the two generations that adult children feel can be cured by becoming the main caregiver, to make up for the past. These unresolved issues will, eventually, get in the way of the adequate provision of care on a long-term basis. Recognize that fact, with the help of a professional or through a support group and come to terms with this issue with your parent. Letting others provide care for an older relative without feeling guilty can be a starting point in the new relationship between the two of you and can be a key to preventing deterioration of your own well-being.

*The information in this article was adapted from Multiple Roles: Handling the Guilt  
agingcare.com, by Helen Hunter, ACSW, LCSW 2018.*

***\*If you would like to join our mailing list to learn more about programs and services available to you contact our Family Caregiver Support Coordinator at [caregiver2@senior-resources-guilford.org](mailto:caregiver2@senior-resources-guilford.org)***

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For referrals to community organizations in Guilford County that assist older adults and caregivers, contact Senior Resources of Guilford's SeniorLine at (336) 884-6981 in High Point, all other areas (336) 333-6981 or the Caregiver Support Coordinator, at (336) 373-4816 in Greensboro or (336) 883-3586 in High Point.



North Carolina Family Caregiver Support Program  
Completing the Care