



Sandwich Generation Survival

10 Tips for Surviving the Sandwich Generation: Caring for your parents, your children, and yourself.

The "Sandwich Generation" is a term used to describe people who are both caring for their aging parents while raising (or supporting) their own children. According to the Pew Research Center **1 out of every 8** Americans aged 40 to 60 can be described as members of the Sandwich Generation. An additional 7 to 10 million adults are caring for their aging parents from a long distance. For members of the Sandwich Generation, the role of dual caregiver can bring with it significant financial and emotional stress. Here are 10 tips for surviving the Sandwich Generation:

1. **Take Care Of Yourself.** Most caregivers are often too busy to care for themselves. Remember, you won't be any good to your family if you don't take care of yourself. Make it a priority to do something for yourself every day - even if it is just taking a minute to close your eyes and take a deep breath.
2. **Find A Support Network.** Seek out local resources for Sandwich Generation caregivers. Reach out to friends and relatives who can help you out when you need a break or lend an ear when you need someone to talk to.
3. **Open The Lines Of Communication.** Everyone (you, your spouse, your parents, your children, your siblings, etc.) needs to be on the same page about expectations, responsibilities, and limitations. While these conversations can be uncomfortable and emotionally draining, they need to happen.
4. **Get Organized.** To survive caring for your parents, your children, and yourself you must be organized. Maintain a master calendar for all appointments and activities. Develop a filing system for everyone's paperwork. Use a notebook to keep track of to-dos and reminders.
5. **Review Your Parents' Estate Plan.** Now is the time to make sure your parents' are up to date with their estate plan. Encourage them to review their documents with their attorney and make any suggested updates.

6. **Prepare for Health Care Decisions.** Your parents should have a Health Care Directive and HIPAA release as part of their estate plan. Make sure all health care providers have a copy of these documents. If you have been named as a health care agent make sure you understand your parents' wishes for health care decisions and feel comfortable serving in that role.
7. **Prepare to Handle Financial Matters.** Your parents' estate plan may include a Power of Attorney, or your parents may have you named as a signatory or co-owner on their accounts. You need to understand what your legal role is and what your responsibilities are. If you will be caring for your parents' finances you also need to have a clear picture of their financial situation, including income, assets, and debts.
8. **Think About Long-Term Care Options.** Nursing home care or in-home health aides can cost several thousands of dollars *every* month. Long-term care insurance may not be available and Medicare may not cover these costs. Medicaid will not be available until certain eligibility requirements are met. Gifts and property transfers made in the 5 years preceding a Medicaid application will be scrutinized and may result in an ineligibility period. Even if your parents do not currently need, or plan to use, long term care, it is a good idea to consider all options and think about how long term care will be paid for if and when the need arises.
9. **Get Your Own Affairs In Order.** Most people know they *should* have an estate plan with a will, health care directive, and power of attorney, but approximately half of all Americans fail to prepare these important documents. For many people, assisting a loved one with estate planning matters or dealing with the estate of a loved one who failed to plan can be a reminder of one's own need to plan. As tempting as it might be to postpone your own estate planning needs while caring for your parents, take the time to get your own affairs in order. By planning now, you can make things easier for your children later.
10. **Start Your Kids On The Right Path.** Remember, every adult can, and should have, basic estate planning documents including a Health Care Directive and Power of Attorney. Help your children get off on the right foot by making sure they are protected from the start.

With a little bit of planning it is possible to survive the Sandwich Generation without losing your sanity. By taking these steps you can care for your parents, your children, and yourself.