

Sandwich Column

by Leslie Kausch, M.Ed. LPC, Licensed Counselor



She came in at her wit's end. She had taken so much time off for her children's recent illnesses and caring for her elderly mother in a nearby town, that she couldn't miss any more days through the end of the year. The stress of trying to stay on top of her fulltime job, spend time with her kids, and help her increasingly demanding mother were starting to take their toll. She was exhausted, but often couldn't sleep because of her worries. She rarely had time to exercise or eat well, often opting for fast food just to get lunch or dinner covered. And she rarely spent any time with her husband anymore.

We live in an amazing time. Women can have a wide variety of fulfilling, engaging careers. We can set up primary love relationships in many different ways. We can take on a huge range of projects for our lives!

Many of us are also lucky enough to have our parents still living. We get to keep in touch, figure out adult relationships with them, and share our lives with them. As women, we often pick up much of their care as they age as well.

Most women I know are happy to be able to offer a hand to parents. They are pleased to be able to 'give back' some of the care they received as young ones. Unfortunately, a lot of this care giving comes at a time when many of us are sandwiched between those fulfilling careers, and perhaps the demands of a family.

Women have a remarkable capacity to get a tremendous amount of work done, while keeping track of numberless details that keep many systems (work, family, friends) running like well-oiled machines. However, it is sometimes hard for us to keep ourselves on the list of things we need to prioritize!

I told my client that it is important for women in the sandwich generation to subscribe to the airplane model of self-care. Always put your own oxygen mask on before you help others! You will be much more effective and available to your loved ones if you take care of yourself, especially in these three areas:

1. Get help! Reach out to any friends, family, neighbors to find resources to help with some of what you are trying manage.
2. Take care of your body. Try to eat well, take time to sleep, and get some exercise. This will keep you feeling well and minimize the impact of the extra stress.
3. Take care of your spirit. Make time to connect with your faith community, or get out in nature! Research continues to prove substantial health benefits of the natural world and community.
4. Take care of your emotions. When it gets to be too much (and it will), make time to notice your grief, anxiety, sadness, or anger. Talk to someone, write in a journal, or just let yourself cry. It makes a difference.

While it is great that we have so many things we can do in our lives, and we have a tremendous capacity to care for others, taking care of ourselves is at least as important as any other job we do.

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