

# Your Personal Coach

By

Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D.

**Dear Kathleen,**

**Help! I'm being squeezed by too many responsibilities. My mother-in-law is in her 70's and moved in with us last year. She's in good health but relies on me for everything. She doesn't drive and expects me to wait on her. My husband and I have full-time jobs and ten- and twelve-year-old sons. Our boys are good kids but they never do their chores or help out. My husband works all the time so I do all the cooking, cleaning, and transporting for everyone on top of a fifty-hour-a-week job. I'm only forty-five, but I feel like I'm a hundred years old.**

**-- Exhausted**

Dear Exhausted,

No wonder you're exhausted. You're being stretched beyond the limit. You've found yourself right smack in the middle of the "Sandwich Generation" – squeezed between taking care of children and an elderly parent at the same time.

"Sandwich Generation" is a relatively new demographic term to refer to a rather ancient set of social relationships – multigenerational families living together.

A 2001 study conducted by AARP found that 44% of Americans have responsibilities for aging parents at the same time that they're raising children of their own. And like you, most of them are worn out, unless they find some new ways to make this work.

It might not feel that way to you right now, but many cultures find this kind of multigenerational living arrangement to be ideal. Think about the strong sense of community and enduring family ties in many ethnic families or traditional Native American tribes. Or how about the Waltons? Andy, Opie, and Aunt Bea?

Multigenerational family living can be a blessing or a curse. But the blessings can only be realized when everyone contributes and everyone benefits. So why do you feel that you should be responsible for everything?

You're being stressed by too many responsibilities and too little time. Unless you change things, you're going to crash and burn. You can't expect to do it all. It's time for a family meeting where everyone learns that he/she has to contribute to the well-being of your family, and that it's past time to divvy up some of the chores.

Ten- and twelve-year-old kids should have some responsibilities. Your kids will grow up with good values and healthy self-esteem by taking age-appropriate responsibilities. There's no reason why your boys can't make their beds, wash dishes, work in the yard, or help with general cleaning.

How about car-pooling with other parents, so that your kids can get to their activities? Surely there are other moms and dads in your area who are in your same boat – racing to get their kids to soccer games and music lessons. You can all help each other by taking turns shuttling the kids around.

There's also no reason why your mother-in-law can't take responsibility for some of the cooking and housework. (Remember all those fine meals and apples pies Aunt Bea

served up? Yum!) You write that she's in good health and older people deserve respect (as everyone does) but just being seventy doesn't give anyone the right to be "waited on."

Lots of people your mother-in-law's age and older live vibrant, active lives with friends and activities. Involvement in clubs, church, or volunteer groups will help her live a happier life and give her access to others who can help with transportation.

Encourage her to check out resources for senior citizens in your area. Very often, there are agencies that offer free transportation or charge only a nominal fee for this service.

Let your hubby know that you appreciate his work ethic but you need him to shoulder more of his responsibilities as a father and as a son.

You have to take care of yourself first.

I hope this doesn't sound "selfish" to you because the truth is that if you don't take care of you, then you will be of no help to anyone else – you can't give what you don't have. You need time for rest and relaxation. Stay healthy by eating right, and getting proper amounts of exercise and sleep.

Discover an activity *you* love – something that nourishes your soul -- and make room for this in your life. Most importantly, change your belief that you should be solely responsible for everything your family needs.

Remember: You are part of a family and everyone has a role to play in making this sandwich work.

Send your personal coaching questions to [kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com](mailto:kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com), call 473-4004, or direct questions to the Outer Banks Sentinel, P.O. Box 546, Nags Head, NC 27949

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