

## Your Personal Coach

Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D.

Dear Kathleen,

**I am very close to my mother, though we live on opposite sides of the country. My husband and two kids and I try to go see her twice a year. My mother just turned eighty, though she is very active and fit, mentally and physically. When we visit, we usually stay a week, and I know that it is tough on her. With two small kids, we are, unfortunately, like a traveling circus compared to the life mom usually leads. My problem is, that since my mom is getting on in years, I really want our time together to be meaningful. I want to contribute to her life, to learn more about how she feels and what she thinks, now. Unfortunately, I spend all my time just trying to limit the wear and tear on her, and she spends all her time being "the hostess." Any suggestions?**

**-- Dutiful Daughter**

Dear DD,

Your mom is very lucky to have a daughter like you, who makes time for her by traveling coast to coast with young kids. You are also demonstrating great love in your desire for your time together to be rich in quality and connection.

Forewarned is forearmed as they say. Einstein defined "insanity" as doing the same things over and over and expecting a different outcome. So let's try a different tack with your traveling circus. As the kids get older, they will be more independent and less likely to spin like whirling dervishes through your mom's house. But just as they are aging, so is your mother, and at 80, even though she is fit and healthy, you have to come up with some solutions now. Have you considered having your mother visit with you for one of those two yearly visits (or, hey, add another one to your schedule)? Outside of her domain, your mother will be less likely to have to wear the mantle of the "hostess with the mostess." Also, your kids will be in their own environment with resources (friends, babysitters, daycare) that can clear some time for you to spend with your mother.

Consider flying to visit your mother and then all taking off for some new adventure. Think about sightseeing or staying at a motel where you can all relax and she won't feel pressured to prepare fabulous meals and keep her place sparkling clean (an impossible feat with young children around, imho; I say let the Holiday Inn do it).

At the very least, I recommend that you set aside time during these visits that you can spend with your mother alone. Ask hubby to take the kids to a movie so that you and Mom can have dinner out, take a walk on the beach together, or look through old photo albums over a glass of wine.

You sound like the kind of woman who would do that for your husband if the situation were reversed, and he wanted quality time with one of his parents. Nevertheless, remind him that you will be happy to do the same for him when the time comes. You might also try to find a babysitter in your mother's neighborhood, so you and your husband could both take your mother to someplace special.

I think life is best lived in balance. Certainly your mother needs and wants time with your kids and husband, and that should be an important part of the mix. But she also will benefit from time with you alone. I'm sure she has stories to tell, and you are interested

Your Personal Coach

Kathleen Brehony

6/16/04

in keeping a deep relationship with her characterized by intimate conversations, and just being in each other's authentic presence. This is almost impossible to do with kids swinging off the curtains.

My dad (age 79) and stepmother Deanne live several hours away, and I make it a point to see them often. But the truth is, that when I'm at their home there are always lots of other people around. Now don't get me wrong. These people are my brother, his wife, niece, nephew, etc. I love them and want to see them, too. But recently, I spent a week with Dad and Deanne alone and it was wonderful. We had dinner out, spent long hours sitting on the deck sipping coffee and just talking. It was invigorating, and I remembered that older people also have dreams and hopes. It was an intimate and important time in my relationship with my father. Unlike your mother, my Dad has had some serious health problems. He says that his whole life now is about 'making memories.' As evidenced by our low-key visit, those memories don't have to be a trip to Disneyland. They can be as simple as a smile or a quiet conversation that we both will always remember. Quality time is about being present, about listening, about basking in the love we have for that person.

I'll bet that you design your trip with exquisite details for insuring that your children will have a good time: Monday – the zoo; Tuesday – the beach; Wednesday – the museum... As you work out your schedule add, Thursday – have dinner alone with Mom while hubby takes the kids to Chucky Cheese. All good time management begins with planning.

Finally, think about taking some time for you and your mother to meet somewhere. Take a vacation with her to some port o' call that you have both always wanted to visit. I know that isn't easy with young children and other responsibilities, but it is not impossible. I'll donate my frequent flyer miles to the cause.

Send your personal coaching questions to [kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com](mailto:kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com) or call 473-4004. Kathleen is a personal and executive coach, clinical psychologist, and writer. (©2004 Kathleen Brehony. All Rights Reserved.) Columns are archived at [www.fullpotentialliving.com](http://www.fullpotentialliving.com).