

Like many of my readers, I am part of the so called “sandwich generation.” This means that, while raising my own children at home, I am also responsible for the general care and well-being of an aging parent. According to a 2012 survey conducted by the Pew Research Center, nearly half (47%) of adults in America in their 40s and 50s have a parent age 65 or older and are either raising a young child or financially supporting a grown child (age 18 or older).

As a caregiver, I work hard to ensure that all the loose ends are tied up and that the needs of those I am caring for are being met. Sometimes, however, my own personal well-being gets lost in the shuffle of life. The emotional, spiritual, and physical demands of a caregiver are very real and can take a toll on their own health. The Kansas Department for Aging and Disability’s publication, “Kansas Caregiver Guide” offers a wealth of information about how to be an effective and resourceful caregiver. In that publication, there are 10 Caregiver Survival Tips offered:

- 1) **Plan ahead.** This is where the calendar comes in handy. Coordinating the various doctor’s appointments for my mom with those of my children and myself can be stressful, to say the least. Keeping my calendar at hand helps me ensure that I don’t overlap appointments and don’t schedule over the responsibilities I have as a full time career woman.
- 2) **Learn about available resources.** Make contact with your local aging agency. For residents of Geary County, you would contact the North Central-Flint Hills Area Agency on Aging. Their phone number is 785-776-9294 or 1-800-432-2703. On their webpage, <http://www.ncfhaaa.com>, click on the *Assistance* tab at the top. This will take you directly to the page on resources and services. There is a designated section for caregiver support that has several helpful media and print resources.
- 3) **Take one day at a time.** As my dad used to say “Don’t borrow from tomorrow.” Do the best you can each day and move forward knowing that you are not a superhero, but just simply human.
- 4) **Develop contingency plans.** Consider who can be a “plan B” caregiver. Both my brother and I live within 20 miles of my mom’s home. If my immediate family can’t tackle mom’s imminent need, the responsibility falls on my brother. If it’s not an emergency, I try to adjust my schedule to be there for mom, especially since I am her designated agent in her Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care.
- 5) **Accept help.** I am fortunate that mom lives in an apartment complex with neighbors that know her schedule and health limitations. She has one particular neighbor that is willing to help with mom’s errands when she can. There are other people and services in the community that mom can use. For example, she utilizes the delivery service offered by the local pharmacy and the laundry services offered at the laundry mat. It may cost a bit more for these services, but it is still less expensive than the gas it costs to make a trip for these tasks.
- 6) **Make YOUR health a priority.** Caregivers, and those who just naturally tend to be nurturers, tend to put their own needs aside in order to take care of others. Staying emotionally, spiritually, and physically healthy is essential, if not critical. You cannot care for someone else effectively if you are not healthy.

- 7) **Get enough rest and eat properly.** I am guilty of occasionally skipping meals and staying up late to finish the housework. I know I am not alone in these bad habits. Adults needs at least 8 continuous hours of sleep a day. We need to make sure we are eating a balanced diet and finding time to exercise and keep our bodies agile. Do your best to plan those healthy practices every day.
- 8) **Make time for leisure.** I almost have to chuckle at that thought – only because I wonder how to fit that in to my own daily/weekly schedule. Anyone in the “sandwich generation” knows that personal time is a premium. However, my recommendation is to find something you enjoy doing that can be picked up and put down easily. For me, that is done by reading. Another avenue for leisure is to go for walks. That helps address two areas of life that often get compromised as a caregiver.
- 9) **Be good to yourself!** Enjoy life, laugh often, and stay in touch with close friends and family as a support system to help you during this season of life.
- 10) **Share your feelings with others.** Find others in your community or family who are experiencing the same challenges. Some of my best coping and organization ideas have come from others who are living in the “sandwich generation” like me.

There are many publications and resources that you can access to help you be a better caregiver. The Kansas Caregiver Guide, http://www.kdads.ks.gov/publications/resource_guide/kanpoa_health.pdf, is a comprehensive resource that has a wealth of information including state agency contact information.

I also strongly recommend that your care receiver complete a Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care to keep on file with physicians, family members, and their lawyer, if applicable. To research more about this document, I encourage you to access the K-State Research and Extension publication titled “Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care in Kansas” at <http://www.ksre.ksu.edu/bookstore/pubs/MF2816.pdf> or you can stop by the Geary County Extension office to pick up a copy, free of charge, at 119 E. 9th Street in Junction City. You can contact me, 238-4161, with more questions about caregiving. Until next time, keep living resourcefully!