

When You Take Care of your Mom or Dad and Hold down a Job

Are you taking care of your parent, spouse or an older relative while holding down a full-time or part-time job? Is it getting harder to juggle your work and your family obligations?

Although often a labor of love, caregiving for a dependent adult can be very demanding in terms of time and physical, emotional and financial resources. When you are under the threats of layoffs, have lost a job or have seen your assets dwindle, you may find coping with caregiving particularly stressful. Too much stress can be toxic, so you may need to look for ways to take control and make necessary adjustments. Consider a change in approach either by making changes in the caregiving situation or both.

Assess your situation. Ask yourself these questions: Do I have time I need to give the needed care without too much stress? Is caregiving impacting my work or my personal life? Can I afford to cut back on work hours to provide the needed care? Can I find a person or people to help with caregiving or other home tasks? Does my company offer options to provide employees with caregiving solutions? What are the potential consequences of continuing with my present arrangements? If there are things I can't change, what are the inner strengths I can use to cope with the stresses and challenges of my work and family situation?

Many caregivers do not know where to look for help, cannot afford help or are reluctant to ask for help. You may feel it is easier to do things yourself rather than to delegate, or you may fear that the person you care for may not accept a new caregiver or substitute. However, many caregivers find that accepting help prevents burnout and frees up time for all-important self-care.

There are places to look for help. First think about your family, friends and neighbors. Overstressed caregivers can benefit when they share the care. Think back to any offers for help you may have had and see if they are still available. Sometimes relatives and friends can help with non-care tasks such as grocery shopping or laundry. That will free you up to do your caregiving activities. One longer term approach is to set up a care team, a group of people who agree to provide care on a voluntary and rotating schedule, making it likely that no one will have to have more responsibility that they can handle.

Workplace support and other community agencies may help. To enhance employee productivity and satisfaction, some employers have policies that are caregiver friendly such as flexible scheduling.

It may be that services such as adult day care or in home services may be helpful and can help shoulder the emotional and physical costs.

After you assess your situation and identify sources, make an action plan and follow through with it. As a caregiver, you already know to expect the unexpected, so be sure to include back up arrangements as well.

Design your plan to include taking time for yourself. Keep up with your regular medical check-ups and health screenings. Build in time for breaks and relaxation activities.

The Area Agency on Aging, have services available that can help. You can also call them at 800-272-3921. They are sources for help, counseling and support services. Also Take Time Texas is a website sponsored by Texas Health and Human Services that has a database of providers who can provide caregiver services. Also local churches in the county can also be sources as well.