

## October Senior Sense: Support for Sandwich Generation Caregivers

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According to an AARP report, 44 percent of women ages 45 to 55 are in the difficult position of caring for at least one parent and one child under the age of 21. Sandwich generation caregivers typically juggle competing demands, shoulder inordinate responsibilities, and manage multiple family members' schedules and needs. And those competing priorities are never more obvious than at the start of the school year.

Of course this year, back-to-school doesn't look like it usually does. Across the nation, school districts are rolling out elaborate plans due to COVID-19. Some schools are bringing students back into the classroom – with a long list of precautions. Some are rolling out remote learning modules that rely heavily on parental support at home. Others are trying out hybrid models. And still others, like mine, are making “game day decisions,” and the plans are changing as quickly as the coronavirus case count does. If you are parenting while also caring for a parent or parents, and juggling your own work responsibilities, no doubt you are feeling maxed out. Couple that stress with the fact there is no foreseeable end to the COVID-19 crisis, the crisp morning air is heralding the oncoming winter -- and flu season, and the news headlines get crazier by the day, and something has got to give. But what?

There are two things all caregivers, and especially, sandwich generation caregivers, should consider giving up right now: perfection and hyperbole.

First, perfection. When we are caregivers – to our parents and our children, we make a lot of important decisions –emotional, medical, and financial. We have to decide whether or not we think it's safe for our kids to go into the classroom and whether or not we think our parents are safe in assisted living or memory care during COVID. We make these decisions while feeling stressed and time constrained. Know this: there are no perfect choices in caregiving. You will make decisions and they will be okay. Sure, there will be other options. There may even be better options. Sure, circumstances will change. That's okay. The only truly bad decision is to make no decision at all. As a caregiver, especially now, you must remember that you are doing the best you can and that your best is good enough.

Second, hyperbole. As a caregiver your life has enough drama in it – so the last thing you need is to add more. But it's human nature, when we are under stress, to exaggerate our situation. My mother lived the last three months of her life in a hospice home and I felt pulled between spending time with her and being at home and available for my then young children. I felt stressed out and sorry for myself and often thought, “I always have to make sacrifices,” and, “I can never catch a break,” and, “Situations like this always happen to me.” None of those statements were true. I was thinking in hyperbole.

Notice if you are using the words “always” and “never” and ask yourself if your thoughts are true. Most likely they are not. Most likely your stress is leading to hyperbolic thinking and that thinking is increasing your stress. Acknowledge it and stop. And then, replace those negative thoughts with kinder ones.

Back in March, I shared some suggestions on how to navigate the uncertainty and stress at the start of the pandemic. One of the suggestions was to practice compassion. I wrote, “In times of crisis, we can ease our stress and the stress of the people we care for by exhibiting compassion and understanding.” We are wearier six month later, and we may feel like our capacity for compassion has eroded, but that advice still stands. Now, more than ever, your caring and compassion will make a difference – on you, and, your family. It won't be perfect, but it will be enough.

Liz O'Donnell is the founder of [Working Daughter](#) and the author of [Working Daughter: A Guide To Caring For your Aging Parents While Making A Living](#). For caregiving support, information and resources contact a Senior Care Advisor at Care.com. We are master's-level social workers specializing in adult and senior care. Call us today at (855) 781-1303 x3 or email questions to [careplanning@care.com](mailto:careplanning@care.com)

