

Sandwich Generation

By Sheri and Bob Stritof

The Cluttered Nest Syndrome

What is the Sandwich Generation? It is a demanding time when a couple is still dealing with parenting issues, thinking about their own retirement, and yet facing the issues of coping with aging parents. Deciding which has the highest priority can tear a marriage apart.

An estimated 22 percent of the American population can be classified as the Sandwich Generation meaning they are parenting their own children and taking care of their parents at the same time. Some estimates show that nearly two-thirds of the baby boom generation will be taking care of an elderly parent in the next ten years. In 1990, Newsweek reported that the average woman spends 17 years raising children and 18 years helping aging parents.

Many of these couples face major stress in their finances, emotions, and relationships.

What happens to a couple's dreams for a secure retirement, travel, and slowing down?

However, co-residency apparently does not cause major problems for the majority of couples who have intergenerational households. With good communication, having three or four generations under one roof can enhance a family's sense of well-being, provide a sense of belonging for younger children, assist teenagers in moving on to adulthood, and eases the burden of chores due to the extra helping hands.

SUCCESSFUL INTERGENERATIONAL HOUSEHOLD TIPS

- Take care of yourselves and do what you need to do to stay healthy. This includes having some fun and living life to the fullest! Don't put your lives on hold.
- Don't neglect your marriage. Make time for one another.
- Be practical. You can only do what you can do. Don't overload yourselves either emotionally, physically or financially.
- If you have boomerang children returning home, make sure all your expectations have been shared. Call them to be responsible adults even though they are living in your home.
- If you decide to have an aging parent live with you, again, share all your expectations. Remember that your parent can and probably wants to have responsibilities in your household. Let them be involved, productive members of the family.
- Protect your privacy and time alone as a couple and as individuals.
- Realize that any unfulfilled dreams may cause problems in your marriage. Talk about these with one another.
- Don't be afraid to ask for help from community and governmental resources.
- Start talking now about the possibility of someday being part of the Sandwich Generation. How do you think you would handle it?