



## Surviving the Sandwich Generation

The term "sandwich generation" has been used for years to describe middle-aged adults squeezed between the simultaneous demands of caring for their aging parents—who may be ill, unable to perform certain tasks or in need of financial support—and supporting their dependent children.

In recent years, however, the term has evolved to encompass caring for grandchildren and/or supporting adult children living at home.

Basically, this era of life finds you caring for both older loved ones and younger loved ones at the same time. Double the family responsibilities, the obligations. Or even triple, or more.

It can quickly get overwhelming.

You may not even realize just how much physical and mental stress you are under, or how much that has been sapping your effectiveness at work and at home. Guilt may be a constant companion. While you take care of your parents, you may feel that you're not doing enough for your children, and vice versa.

You may experience feelings of grief and loss, as you see your parents changing and the roles of your family shifting. You may also feel fearful and anxious about your parent's mortality, and that gets you thinking about your own.

With all of the extra time you need to take care of others, there is less time—if any—to spend on yourself and the things that recharge you. Here are five ways to take care of yourself while taking care of your aging parents.

### 1. Put on your oxygen mask first.

First, meet your own needs. You can't help anyone else if you are so sapped of energy and joy that you are miserable. Block out time every day for something that's just for you. Give

equal attention to your emotional, spiritual and physical needs. Protect that time as your most important appointment—because it is!

**2. Seek out helpful resources.** There are government and/or community resources for home care, medications, support groups, mobility aids and adaptive equipment for your aging parents. Keep organized records of their medical history, as well as the contact information and recommendations of everyone you consult with. You will rest easier knowing that professionals are involved and you're not trying to make decisions that you're not qualified to make.

**3. Ask for help.** Reach out to supportive friends or family members; even a short phone call can give you a much-needed lift. Also, seek out a support group, or individual therapy or counseling.

**4. Let go of guilt.** Accept that you're doing your best and acknowledge the efforts you're making. Actually list them on paper if you need to! If you notice yourself feeling guilty, ask yourself if you would want someone in the same situation as yours to feel guilty. The answer, certainly, is no.

**5. Create positive memories.** As your family changes, focus on remembering and sharing positive memories of your life together. Also, create new rituals and traditions that everyone can participate in, such as sing-alongs, games, crafts or nature walks.

Start right now with even one of these strategies. It will feel like a breath of fresh air, loosening the grip of your tightly packed life and infusing your entire family with renewed energy and joy. \*

## 10 Ways to Support Your Mental Health

*In addition to therapy, any or all of the following practices can add to your emotional quality of life and support your mental health:*

**1. Groups.** Meeting others with similar life experiences can provide support and clarify issues.

**2. Meditation.** Sitting with your thoughts can increase your capacity for insight and self-awareness.

**3. Bodywork.** Treatments such as massage and Reiki can bring to consciousness buried feelings and traumas stored in the body.

**4. Eating/exercise.** A healthy diet helps clarify your thinking and exercise helps relieve mild to moderate depression so that you can confront challenging issues.

**5. Artistic/creative pursuits.** These soul-nourishing activities promote healing by opening access to wiser places inside.

**6. Dream tracking.** Dreams bring up unconscious or semiconscious material to consider and process.

**7. Affirmations/positive self-talk.** Such practices can boost your self-esteem and the confidence you'll need to confront issues.

**8. Relevant reading.** Books and articles can augment the work you're doing with your therapist.

**9. Volunteering.** Helping others who are struggling can increase your compassion for and tolerance of your own struggles.

**10. Time in nature.** Being in nature can bring a sense of peace and appreciation that promotes healing. \*

## A Letter From Geoff Chapin



Much has been written about the so-called “sandwich generation,” those who find themselves caring for both parents and children, on top of career and other responsibilities. The resulting, unrelenting schedule can take its toll. And newer trends are only adding to the stresses. And yet, so many respond with guilt to the extraordinary pressures they face. The cover article explores the unique stresses faced by those who are caring for aging parents, and then offers several strategies for taking care of oneself.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, or PTSD, the subject of the page 3 article, is an anxiety disorder that can develop after witnessing or experiencing intensely traumatic events. It’s a serious condition, but it is manageable with treatment. The article explores how to recognize the symptoms of PTSD and ways to get help.

It’s nearly impossible to thrive if you are chronically indebted. Either you are unable to control your spending and/or you compulsively earn less than you need and make up for it by taking on debt. The article on page 4 can help you determine if you have a debt addiction and suggests a path to recovery.

Also in this issue, the quiz asks how healthy your sex life and how well you’re able to maintain that “spark” in your relationship. And the Top 10 offers practices that can support your mental health, whether you’re in therapy or daily stresses mean you could use the support.

If you have questions about any of the articles or would like more copies, please don’t hesitate to call.

## Is the Sexual Spark Alive in Your Relationship?



*It can be challenging to keep the sexual spark alive in a marriage or a long-term relationship. But the couples that do so will reap the reward of being more connected—not to mention feeling more playful and more physically healthy! Take the quiz below to find out if you have a thriving sex life.*

### True False

1. I am able to articulate my sexual needs to myself. I know what I like and what I don’t like.
2. My partner and I communicate in an open and loving manner about most things that matter to us.
3. I communicate my likes and dislikes to my partner. I don’t expect him or her to “just know” how to please me.
4. Without judgment or embarrassment, I talk openly and fearlessly with my partner about my thoughts and feelings about sex.
5. I share my sexual hopes, dreams, and aspirations in an intimate manner with my partner.
6. I avoid making assumptions about what does and doesn’t turn on my partner. I ask for feedback and guidance.
7. Experimentation and play are key elements in my sexual relationship.
8. I have realistic expectations of my partner and I avoid being overly demanding.
9. I enjoy having sex with my partner on a regular basis.
10. I look forward to having sex with my partner and do not see it as a chore or obligation.
11. My partner and I make time for sex and don’t allow it to end up on the backburner.
12. I leave unexpected notes and surprise gifts for my partner.
13. Foreplay is an integral part of my sex life.
14. My partner and I are able to embrace and incorporate each other’s turn-ons in a healthy and loving manner.

*If you marked true on most of the questions, your sex life is likely healthy and vibrant. If you marked “false” on most of the questions, don’t worry. Cultivating a loving sexual relationship with your partner is possible. Consider honing your communication skills as a first step towards a healthy sex life. If you have questions or want to talk about your or your partner’s response to this quiz, please don’t hesitate to call. \**

# Finding Your Way Through PTSD to Well-Being

When Sara was seven years old, her stepfather sexually abused her. Now in her thirties, she wants to put the past behind her but can't. She's unable to establish intimate relationships and has frequent nightmares about her abuse.

Jorge returned from Afghanistan where he witnessed an improvised explosive device (IED) destroy a Humvee in his convoy, killing his best friend. He's no longer the easy-going guy he once was. He has angry outbursts at the slightest provocation and uses illegal drugs to repress his wartime memories.

It may not appear that Jorge's wartime experience has much in common with Sara's sexual abuse, but it does. As a result of the trauma they've each experienced, they both now suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder or PTSD.

## Let's Define PTSD

PTSD is an anxiety disorder that affects individuals who've experienced firsthand (or witnessed) intensely traumatic events. Stressors known to cause PTSD include: violent personal attacks such as assault, physical and/or sexual abuse, rape, mugging or murder; car, plane or train accidents; military combat; captivity; and natural disasters, such as hurricanes, tornadoes or earthquakes.

Although most experts agree that 1 in 10 children and adults has PTSD, not everyone who experiences a traumatic event will develop the condition. Experts are uncertain as to why some people suffer from PTSD while others, who've experienced similar trauma, do not.

## How to Know If You Have PTSD

Symptoms of PTSD can occur months or even years after a traumatic event and typically fall into three categories:

**1. You avoid or withdraw.** You tend to avoid activities, situations or people that remind you of the trauma. As a result, you may withdraw from friends, family and activities you once enjoyed. You may have a partial or total memory lapse of the traumatic event. For example, Ernesto rarely leaves the house and refuses to let his wife, Maria, go anywhere alone. His heightened state of alert, trying to protect her as he feels he failed to do with his best friend, has meant increased isolation for the couple, as Maria gives in to his fear.

**2. You remember and relive.** You have frequent and

vivid memories of the traumatic event. Your recurring nightmares, flashbacks or hallucinations are triggered by certain images, smells and sounds. You may experience anxiety, difficulty concentrating, agitation, outbursts or fatigue.

**3. Your emotions become numb.** You may "check out" emotionally to avoid situations that might trigger painful emotions. As a result, you may have a difficult time experiencing and expressing emotions or maintaining intimate relationships. For example, Liz both craves and fears intimacy with a significant other and, as a result, has had a series of one-night stands. This allows her to feel connected physically, but means she avoids experiencing, and ultimately coming to terms with, the painful feelings associated with her trauma.

People with PTSD may also experience: substance or alcohol abuse; difficulty finding and/or keeping a job; physical symptoms such as headaches/migraines, breathing irregularities or tightness in the chest; insomnia; increased risk of depression; and suicidal thoughts.

## Options for Treating PTSD

Although there is no "one size fits all" treatment for PTSD three successful options are:

**Seek professional help:** Therapy can help you to reinterpret how you react to your experiences. Discovering what makes you afraid or upset is the first step in finding ways to replace old, harmful thoughts and feelings with new ones that more accurately reflect the situation.

**Support groups:** Communicating and sharing traumatic experiences with others who've had similar experiences helps you process and work through feelings of anger, guilt and fear. Symptoms may never completely disappear, but sharing thoughts and feelings in a structured, safe environment helps manage them while building self-confidence and trust.

**Self-care:** Scheduling time to reflect on the trauma rather than allowing a constant flow of worrying thoughts helps to manage symptoms. As well, living a healthy lifestyle that includes eating healthfully, exercising and getting adequate sleep can help you recover. Yoga and massage can also be helpful.

PTSD is a serious condition. If you recognize the symptoms in yourself or a loved one, seek treatment right away. \*



# Chronic Debting & the Distorted Perceptions Beneath It

You could have a well-paying job or you could fail to make enough to cover your basic expenses.

You could spend compulsively on unneeded things or barely spend at all, neglecting even basic self-care such as dental check-ups.

But whether you add to your debt because of freewheeling spending or chronic underearning, repeated debt results from dysfunctional or distorted subconscious attitudes and perceptions about money and self. These distortions could include:

- I'm not worthy of nice things or a living wage.
- I'm the greatest! I'm going to buy the best, whether I can afford it or not.
- I don't understand money. I'm not smart enough to handle it.
- Money corrupts. If I have money, I'm bad.
- If I don't spend a lot of money on family and friends, they won't love

me or know that I love them.

- I'm a special case. The system is actually stacked against me.

If any of these attitudes resonate and you're having financial trouble, you may have a problem with compulsive debting. To help you determine if that's the case, here are several warning signs, adapted from the 12-Step program Debtors Anonymous (DA):

- 1. Lack of clarity about your financial situation.** Not knowing account balances, monthly expenses, etc.
- 2. Poor saving habits.** Not planning for taxes, retirement or other predictable items, and then feeling surprised when they come due.
- 3. Compulsive shopping:** unable to pass up a "good deal," purchasing on impulse, purchasing to feel better.



4. **Struggling** to meet basic financial obligations.

5. **Living in chaos and drama around money**, such as using one credit card to pay another or bouncing checks.

6. **Overworking or underearning;** taking jobs below your skill and education level; not billing for hours worked.

7. **Living in self-imposed deprivation;** denying your basic needs.

As with alcohol addiction, it is possible to recover from compulsive debting and underearning with the help of a trusted therapist or coach and programs such as DA.

With help and support, you can face the truth of your financial situation, understand the roots of your behavior and begin to see gradual improvement in your finances. Most of all, you'll feel better, no longer at the mercy of a compulsion you can't control. \*

## Chapin & Russell Associates

A Division of Resource Management Services, Inc.  
3020 W. Willow Knolls Drive  
Peoria, IL 61614  
Tel: 309.681.5850 Fax: 309.681.5658

[www.chapinandrussell.com](http://www.chapinandrussell.com)