

# Adults caring for aging parents face role reversal

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**A**dult children caring for their parents while also raising their own families are known as the sandwich generation. These caregivers find themselves pulled in many directions - caring for a parent, raising their children, keeping their marriage healthy

and often holding down a job as well.

On top of all this, adult caregivers are often uneasy about feeling like they're parenting their own parents. "It can be unsettling to find yourself in this role," says Annalise Forman, a Christian counselor and director of Visiting Angels, a senior home care agency serving Sussex County.

"The lives of the caregiver and her entire family have been turned upside down," says Forman. "Despite the fact that they love their parents, it's a big responsibility that truly seems all encompassing."

It's not surprising, then, that guilt and resentment are prevalent

emotions among caregivers. Plans for the immediate future go out the window, and schedules that were already jam-packed need to be reworked. Children may resent the new demands on their parents' time and attention. With all these added stressors, experts emphasize the importance of caretakers looking after their own physical and emotional health.

"You can't take care of someone else without taking care of yourself first," said Forman. This involves getting help from others, whether from siblings, a support group or a healthcare service.

The staff at Visiting Angels understands this need. The company provides nonmedical caregivers

who go into clients' homes to offer companionship, do light house-keeping, help with personal hygiene, run errands, prepare meals, go shopping or take the client to appointments - all services that can provide a respite for families dealing with the care of a loved one.

"For the son or daughter, a few hours' break, the ability to go to work, or having someone else stay the night when needed can really make a huge difference and go a long way toward restoring normal family dynamics," said Forman.

Her company hires only experienced caregivers who pass a rigorous screening process. The screeners also look for intangible

traits such as a caring personality. Many are former hospital staffers.

"We work with each family to develop an individualized program to manage the daily needs of the client and then match those needs to the best possible caregiver," said Forman. Caregivers are then introduced to the family, which has the final say in the selection process.

Once the caregiver has been placed in the home, Visiting Angels continues its personalized contact through telephone check-ins and home visits to make sure the match is a good one.

Annalise Forman is director of Visiting Angels. She has a master's degree in Christian counseling.