

Juggling Divided Loyalties

We all have many different loyalties—commitments that we cannot or do not want to break. In addition to your aging relative, you may have young children, a spouse, in-laws, a job, pets—all of which demand and deserve your attention. How do you juggle these different loyalties? How do you provide care for your elder without skimping or the attention you give to the other parts of your life? Here are some tips:



Prioritize

Look critically at your different commitments. Which are most important? Which take the most time? Which can you do without? This process will help you to break your life down into manageable parts that you can organize according to this new commitment of caring for your elderly relative.

Budget Your Time

After figuring out which commitments are the most important, you can budget your time. Make a time budget just as you would a financial budget, allotting day/time segments for all of your commitments.

Look for Flexibility

With caregiving, there are going to be unexpected things that come up. For this reason, try to allow for flexibility in your schedule. This may mean having back-up caregivers (for both your elderly relative and your children) and contingency plans, and it also may mean looking for a job that will give you flextime.

Don't Expect Perfection

Remember that no matter how much you try, you will not be perfect. Caregiving is not an exact science and when you are juggling a number of different balls sometimes you may drop one. Forgive yourself, and move on.

Find Help

You should seriously consider getting help, particularly if you have a number of different commitments. This help may mean home care or homemaker services for your elderly relative, childcare for your children or more employees for your business. It can also mean finding friends, family members and others who can help you in your caregiving work.

Take a Break

Finally, don't forget to take a break. With all of the commitments you face, you will need rest. After all, you won't be able to care for anyone if you are exhausted and run down. Take care of yourself first, and then you will be able to care for all the other people in your life. This might be a daily break—reading a few chapters in a book or taking a warm bath, for instance—or a more prolonged vacation. Either way, you will refresh and renew yourself.

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