The “Sandwich Generation” is a well used term that describes what happens when one generation becomes responsible for the care of two generations; one generation from their family of origin and the second generation of their own creation. Essentially the family of origin goes out into the world, finds a job and begins their lives together. The family of creation may include raising children and on the story goes. We are very well versed in this type of care; terms like childcare, elder care and personal care.

A very traditional example, going back several years is the early farm families. Farms often had two or three homes to facilitate the growth and aging of the family. Everyone grew up working on the farm and once parents/grandparents aged they moved into one of the secondary homes and the youngest family took over the running of the farm. This still happens today but as time changes there are less and less farms. Yes, things change and of course things are often never that simple.

What about the inter-generational conflict that we talk of today, did it not exist then? We have heard stories that started out with “in my day we...” or “when I was a child we walked three miles to school”, lines such as “this younger generation doesn’t know how hard life really can be......” , “when I was born there wasn’t the internet and now everything is online” The generational differences may still reflect conflict but the words have changed - “I communicate with my friends through Facebook”, “I like to express myself with body art, perhaps a tattoo”, or with regards to TV programming “I’d like to watch what I want, when I want - what wonderful differences can occur between generations. Don’t we often hear ourselves say the same things to our children as our parents told us?

However, it is my belief that things have changed significantly since we first used the term “Sandwich Generation”. The stories I hear now talk of different times. For instance, given the current economic uncertainties, layoffs and plant closures the concern becomes more systemic. Grown children with families of their own are often moving back in with a parent/parents who still have a job. And even if they do not move home to their family of origin, parents (now grandparents) are helping in every way they can financially, physically and emotionally. The family of origin is now raising the family of creation. Another scenario involves a parent/grandparent moving in with their children because it would not be feasibly/financially possible for both parents to work and have to pay for childcare. There was a story in the news a couple of weeks ago that suggested there are fewer stay at home moms and that for most families both parents now work in some capacity.

People are living longer and many like to continue working because they love what they do while others continue to work because of the large debt ratio we continue to hear about daily on media. For many, good health continues for many years and even if only working part time they continue to feel they are at least being productive in some way. However, the stories on the news now focus on how this prevents the availability of jobs for young people beginning their careers and family life.

The terminology of sandwich generation somehow seems inadequate given the complexity of the issues we face financially, emotionally, ethically and personally. If we are “much more” than a sandwich generation we may change the dialogue in a way that honors the complexities we are now faced with. Change is difficult for all, but is also inevitable.

One technique that has worked well in my professional and personal life is to share the story and the experience. I am not talking about stories that begin with “Once upon a Time” but ones that are filled with pain, struggles, frustrations but also ambitions, hopes, desires, dreams. Sharing these elements bring a better understanding of who we are and where we are heading. The stories convey context, conflict and resolution, emotion, history, hope and often include resilience. Sharing stories can help create dialogue which can help create understanding, empathy and often solutions.
At one time they were the only form of communication passed down from generation to generation. Now we see stories being shared in many ways - social media, in marketing commercials, in charity campaigns. We love stories. Why are they important? The answer is quite simple really. It is an oral history that describes the richness of a moment in time encapsulated in the perceptions, descriptions and meanings of its author.

I invite you to share your stories because they really do matter. Sharing stories are a way to explore unanswered questions and means to better understand each other and as a result are a way to engage each other in the process of change. Change only occurs when we ask questions that we don't know the answer to. There are no definitive answers to solving the complex issues of feeling “sandwiched” but one thing we know is that we need to change, to cope and to adapt.

Perhaps you have stories that you can share with trusted friends, families, partners, colleagues, the person working next to you, or even with therapists from your EAP program. Is there a solution that needs to occur to adequately support, change, nurture, or rewrite the stories in ways that will have a better ending? Identify who needs to be a part of that opening dialogue. Share your experience. Re-create the new reality of “Sandwich Generation” Remember we are all authors of our stories.

“Each age, it is found, must write it’s own books; or rather each generation for the next succeeding”

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Does the Cost of Grocery Shopping Concern You?

Groceries is that one word can strike fear into the hearts of people. While some prices have remained relatively unchanged in the last 4 years, bananas as an example were 1.70 a kg in 2011 and today the average cost is 1.73 kg, others have risen dramatically. Talk shows across the country are fielding calls as listener’s air there beef about beef. In 2011 according to Stats Canada a Kilo of ground beef in March 2011 listed for 7.99 today is priced at 12.43 a kilogram. That Sirloin Steak for the BBQ this weekend listed at 15.54 a kilogram in March 2011 sells for 21.86 on average.

Making the most of your funds available for groceries is important. Checking flyers and matching prices can save the family money, a lot of money at times. Those weekly flyers can be a key to keeping your budget in line. For those who are tech savvy you might want to check out available apps at your favourite app store. Success stories from individuals who use apps such as Flip, Checkout 51, Snapsaves and GasBuddy abound.

This time of the year farmer markets can not only help you support your local economy but save money too. Farmer markets are not just for produce either, be sure to check for local meat farmers and packers close to you. My research has shown many local farms can also help you save money on your food budget.

Enjoy your summer from your EAP Credit Counselling team at fseap Thames Valley and remember debt is manageable, if you have any concerns book your appointment today.

For further assistance please contact fseap at 1-877-433-0701.

We offer confidential individual, group, and family counselling to all ages. During business hours counselling is provided in-person. Qualified counsellors can also be reached for phone counselling at the above number 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

REMINDER: Should you need to cancel or rebook your appointment, please provide at least 24 hours’ notice.

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