



Caregiver Burnout and the Sandwich Generation

An explainer and caregiver load inventory · Created by Simar Gill Lowther, MACP, RP (CRPO)
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At a glance

- Many adults care for children and ageing parents at the same time, the "sandwich generation."
- Caregiving is meaningful, and it can also lead to exhaustion, guilt, and isolation.
- Seeing your full load on paper is the first step to sharing it and asking for help.

The invisible load

Caregiving includes far more than physical tasks. It includes appointments, medications, phone calls, finances, emotional support, worry, and constant mental planning. Much of it is invisible, even to the people closest to you. In many families, especially multigenerational households, caregiving expectations fall unevenly, often on daughters and daughters-in-law.

Signs of caregiver burnout

- Feeling exhausted even after rest
- Irritability, resentment, or snapping at the people you care for
- Withdrawing from friends and activities you used to enjoy
- Getting sick more often
- Feeling guilty whenever you take time for yourself
- Feeling hopeless or trapped

What the research says

A meta-analysis found that caregivers experience significantly higher stress and depression and lower wellbeing than non-caregivers (Pinquart & Sörensen, 2003). Caregivers who have social support and some time for themselves tend to cope better and experience less burden.

Tool: My Caregiver Load Inventory

List everything you do in a typical week. Include tasks that are mental and emotional, not just physical.

Task	Hours per week	Could someone else help? (Y/N)	Who or what could help?

My support map

Family members who could share tasks:

Friends, neighbours, or faith community:

Community or government services to look into (e.g., home care, respite, caregiver support groups):

One thing I will ask for help with this week:

Strategies to try

- **Ask specifically.** "Could you drive Mom to her appointment Thursday?" works better than "Let me know if you can help."
- **Schedule respite.** Even a few hours a week to yourself can protect your health.
- **Join a caregiver group.** Talking with others in the same situation reduces isolation.
- **Let go of perfect.** Good-enough care, given sustainably, is better than perfect care that burns you out.
- **Check your own health.** Keep your own doctor's appointments.

Strategies you may not have heard of

These less common, evidence-informed techniques go beyond the usual advice. Try one at a time and notice what works for you.

- **Hold a family task meeting.** Write every caregiving task on a shared list or calendar and ask each family member to choose specific ones.
- **Name the ambiguous loss.** When someone you love is changing, through dementia or illness, you may grieve them while they're still here. Naming this "ambiguous loss" can ease confusion and guilt.
- **Prescribe yourself respite.** Treat respite like a medical appointment that can't be cancelled.
- **Use a "one thing" ask.** Each week, ask one person for one specific task. Small, regular asks are easier to say yes to.

Journal prompts

Take your time with these. Write freely; there are no right answers.

What does caregiving mean to me? What values does it reflect?

What do I find hardest about my caregiving role?

What feelings do I keep to myself (resentment, grief, guilt)?

If I could have one hour a week just for me, how would I use it?

When to reach out for support

If you're feeling exhausted, resentful, hopeless, or alone in caregiving, you deserve support too. Therapy can help you process the emotional weight and find ways to share the load.

Insightful Journey Inc. offers therapy in person in Oshawa and virtually across Ontario, in English, Hindi, Punjabi, and Urdu. Direct billing available.

[Book a free consultation](#) · 647-982-2527 (call, text, or WhatsApp)

In crisis? Call or text 9-8-8, or call 911.

This resource is for education and self-reflection. It is not a diagnostic tool and is not a substitute for professional assessment or care.

References

Boss, P. (1999). Ambiguous loss: Learning to live with unresolved grief. Harvard University Press.

Pinquart, M., & Sörensen, S. (2003). Differences between caregivers and noncaregivers in psychological health and physical health: A meta-analysis. *Psychology and Aging*, 18(2), 250–267.

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