



Family Caregivers  
of British Columbia

Family Caregivers of BC

# **GUILT AND MAKING DECISIONS: ROLE OF ADULT CHILDREN IN ASSISTING PARENTS**

Should you have more questions, we invite you to give our staff a call at our toll-free Caregiver Support Line, open Monday - Friday 1-877-520-3267



## GUILT AND MAKING DECISIONS: ROLE OF ADULT CHILDREN IN ASSISTING PARENTS

### Feelings of Guilt:

Adult children may feel guilty as caregivers of parents because of beliefs valued throughout life:

- It is selfish to put my own needs ahead of those of others.
- No one can care for my parent as well as I.
- I must do it all and make everyone happy.
- A result of feeling guilty in the process of assisting parents with caregiving and decisions is that the adult child may experience depression and a lack of energy. They may feel insecure in solving problems and become overprotective.

### Communication Supports Joint Decision-Making:

Mims (1998) explains that the route sometimes taken by adult children is simply to make decisions for their parents. This is the "quick and easy" approach for the present, but can create problems in the future. It is better for the adult parents and children to practice "joint decision-making." This is a process in which communication plays a key role in determining the outcome. It takes time for both parents and children to get information, explore options, and consider the consequences of choices. As long as older parents are capable of making their own decisions, it is important to allow them to act.

Some communication strategies that support joint decision-making include:

- Be sensitive to the changes in parent's abilities and circumstances over time. Your role is to strengthen your parent's capabilities by effective support. Your degree of involvement may vary over time.
- Listen and respect the views of parents. Differences of opinion will occur. Different personal attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs can lead to different reactions to the same situation. Try to understand your parent's point of view.
- You have more influence than authority with parents. Encourage and allow them to make their own decisions.
- Let go. Remember that parents are like you and your own children--they resent being told what to do.
- Be sensitive to your parents' fears of helplessness and changes in health and abilities. Give them your support, not interference.
- Use logic, resources, warmth, and sincerity. Parents will appreciate these qualities.

Adult children who assist parents with decisions must recognize that parents are ultimately responsible for their own lives. As long as they are mentally and emotionally capable of making their own decisions, they should be encouraged to do so.



## **References**

Brody, E. (1995). Prospects for family caregiving: Response to change, continuity and diversity, In R. A. Kane and J. D. Penrod (Eds.), *Family caregiving in an aging society: Policy perspectives*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Karr, K. (1992). *How caregivers can effectively deal with stress*. Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books.

Mims, K. B. (1998). *Aging parents and decision-making: Role of adult children*. Family Information Services, Minneapolis, MN.

FROM: Ohio State University Fact Sheet Family Life Month Packet 1999 Family and Consumer Sciences  
Campbell Hall 1787 Neil Avenue Columbus, Ohio 43210

For more information, visit the Human Development and Family Life website at: <http://www.hec.ohio-state.edu/famlife/>