

## The American Counseling Association's "Counseling Corner" Weekly Columns

### When The Demands Of An Aging Parent Go Over The Line

from the American Counseling Association

The good news? We're living longer. Lifestyle changes and improved health care are helping us outlive recent generations.

The not-so-good news is that many families now have one or more elderly parents who may be burdening their children's lives with their needs for assistance.

It can present a difficult situation. While we may feel a strong sense of responsibility for our elderly relatives, we also have very real obligations to our spouses and children. Balancing those competing demands can prove a challenge.

It's important to evaluate how real the needs for assistance are. Health issues are the easiest to recognize and the ones that we want and need to meet first.

But in some cases elderly parents are simply demanding. They may feel that their adult children "owe" them and the result can be a never-ending list of "important" needs they expect help with.

Giving in to such demands, usually out of guilt, can leave us feeling angry and frustrated, and can lead to family problems as our spouse's and children's needs get pushed aside.

That's when it's time to look for help.

Siblings are one place to turn, even if they don't live in the immediate area. You may be surprised by the ideas and assistance they may be able to offer, even from a distance.

Friends and neighbors can also be sources of help. A neighbor, for example, might be happy to have the company of your elderly parent for a shopping trip or lunch out.

Also check on local social agencies, such as the Council on Aging. You may find they have help available, or can refer you to free or low cost programs offering elderly assistance.

It's also important to be a good time manager in order to fit in the demands of both that elderly parent and your own life. Sometimes it can be as simple as setting a schedule to visit and help, rather than constantly being "on-call."

And sometimes you may have to set priorities and say "no," though that can be difficult. The key is to separate what's absolutely necessary for a parent's well-being, such as those doctor visits, from things like gardening help that really could wait.

Let an aging parent overextend you and everyone involved suffers. Understand your own limits, reasonably and realistically, and you can be better at truly helping someone you love.

*Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to [ACAcorner@counseling.org](mailto:ACAcorner@counseling.org) or visit the ACA website at [www.counseling.org](http://www.counseling.org).*

###