

Catholic Caregivers

'Caregiving is pro-life!'

Your Parent's Generation

Members of each generation who come from the same or a similar culture share common experiences that influence how they think, how they act, and what they see as rock-bottom truth. Look at your parent's life history to better understand him or her. Keeping Dad's or Mom's childhood, adolescent, and early adult experiences in mind will help when you're taking care of your parent now.

This is especially true for families with strong ethnic or cultural backgrounds. Adult children of immigrants need to be aware of the fact that life has changed dramatically from their parents' generation to their own.

For the generation raised in the United States during the 1920s and '30s, the Great Depression was a highly significant event. During the Depression and on through World War II, Americans learned to make do, to go without. They rightfully took pride in their ability to accept those hard times and to live through them.

Later came a generation raised during the 1950s, '60s, and '70s, decades that saw the beginnings of the cold war and nuclear threat, the Vietnam War and the protests against it, the civil rights movement, political assassinations, the decline in religious affiliation and practice, and more.

Just as their parents did, members of this baby-boomer generation carry their history into the present. It could be argued that they have sense of entitlement. Throughout their lives, they have belonged to the largest demographic and society — from numbers of houses in the suburbs to number of schools nationwide, for example — made accommodations for them.

Accustomed to the government adjusting to meet their needs, they may feel entitled. Now if they're helping an aging parent, they expect, and even try to demand, service to assist them with a senior family member. Now, if they are the ones needing help because of their own diminishing health, they may expect their adult children to lead the battle to see to it that they get what is "rightfully ours," whether it be Medicare, Medicaid, veterans' benefits, Social

Security, or services from state and local government.

In a sense, it's easier for a spouse taking care of a spouse (assuming both are of the same generation) or a sibling take care of a sibling than it is for an adult child trying to help a senior family member. That's so because members of the same generation and background more easily know how their peers think, feel and react — even if they have never analyzed, or even considered, why that generation tends to behave that way or where those deep-seated emotions come from.

Common frames of reference means they "speak the language" and have the mindset of their own generation.

Cross-generational caregiving can be more challenging because the one providing care has to consider what a suggestion (getting help from the state) or even a word (the "government") means to the one receiving care.

For a boomer helping her aging mother, the battle may be over getting Mom to accept any state help. If her mother's own family didn't accept "charity" during the Depression or "the War," she's certainly not going to want to "go on the dole" now.

For a boomer's son or daughter taking care of a parent, a part of the tension may be trying to explain why the government has come up short on its explicit or implied promises. Or why Dad isn't eligible for particular services

What this means is that to understand a member of a particular generation, you need to understand the experiences that shaped that generation — whether it's a headline . . . or Woodstock.

Often those experiences are so much a part of who we are that we don't even recognize them as unique to our generation. We assume that all people see things the same way we do or that those who don't are somehow lacking in understanding, wisdom, or common sense.

The bottom line here?

You and your aging parent were born and raised on the same planet but come from different worlds.

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