

Catholic Caregivers

'Caregiving is pro-life!'

Respectful Caregiving as the Parent-Child Roles Reverse

The fourth commandment—honor your father and your mother—doesn't have an age limit. But what does it mean for an adult child taking care of an aging parent as the parent-child roles begin to reverse?

How does it apply—how does one apply it—as the child assumes more responsibilities taking care of Mom or Dad? Is it possible to be dutiful son or daughter *and* a good caregiver?

The short answer is “Yes.” The more complete answer is “Yes, but it's not always easy.”

These are some suggestions:

- Keep in mind that you need to be gentle about the changes that have to be made. Go slowly. Don't suddenly charge in and take control. Start with small things. That's especially so if your parent has a strong personality, if Dad always made and enforced the rules, if Mom ruled the roost. (Realize your parent is going to continue to use what worked for him or her in the past. A yell will yell. A pouter will pout. And so on.)

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- On the other hand, if your parent has always been pretty easygoing but is becoming more and more belligerent, there could be a physical reason. A personality change can be a symptom of dementia.

- If at all possible, let your parent continue to play a part in the decision-making. At a calm time, talk about roles and agree on a plan. Your parent may be unable to do many things the way he or she used to do and so it takes some thought and creativity to find ways to give her control or at least let her maintain some control.

- Remember roles reversing doesn't mean your parent becomes the child and you become the parent. It means you're in this together. And, as with all the stages of the relationship the two of you have shared, this one needs to be based on love and respect.

- Don't lose sight of the fact that your mutually agreed upon plan may disintegrate over time. Or fall apart suddenly. Both your situations can change. Your parent may need more help. You—because of obligations at home and at work—may not be able to provide as much help as you have been providing.

- Recognize that you may be the target of your parent's emotions—the anger, the frustration and the fear—simply because you're there. Your father may say hurtful things because *he* is hurting. “When did you stop loving me?” he'll demand. He'll accuse. It's awfully hard not to feel hurt.

It's tempting to give a sharp answer. Better to take a deep breath and gently remind him of the fact “I do love you.” State it simply. State it kindly. There's no need to list all that you're doing for him. When he feels a little better, when he calms down a bit, he'll remember them. He sees, he knows, what a good son or daughter you are. □

YourAgingParent.com

*Spirituality, Information
and Resources for Catholic Caregivers*

This site is designed for adult children caring for an aging parent but most of the information also applies for someone taking care of a spouse or other loved one.

You'll find basic caregiver information; suggested resources; questions, answers and prayers from fellow caregivers; and an explanation of the support available from the Catholic community. The focus here includes the spirituality of caregiving, using the teachings of the Catholic faith as a foundation.

A Caregiver's Prayer for His or Her Parent

Jesus, my parent and I have our own history and our own life experiences. Help me understand what he (she) has lived through—what has happened to mold and shape him (her).

Teach me so that I can give care to this most unique individual, my dear father (mother).

Amen.

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