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Caring for Your Parents Without Killing Your Siblings

According to Merriam-Webster, sibling is defined as one of two or more individuals having one common parent.

Families have definite roles and functions for siblings to perform. These may vary from family to family, as well as from culture to culture. According to Merriam-Webster, culture may be thought of as a set of shared practices, beliefs and values for a way of life transmitted to succeeding generations through language. In western cultures like ours, the sibling relationship tends to be identified by biological criteria and is less important than our spouses or parent-child relationships.

In other cultures this may be entirely different. In Taiwan, for instance, siblings take turns and cooperate to support and take care of their aging parents. This family structure is called "take-turn stem families" in which siblings make an arrangement, according to a timeline, in which parents will live with them.

A study by sociologists J. Jill Suitor of Louisiana State University and Karl Pillemer of Cornell University reports that caregivers indicated that siblings were overwhelmingly the most important source of interpersonal stress. As adult children caring for aging parents, we are reminded of our own changes in both the physical and emotional realm.

The role of care giving can be broken down into six different areas:

1. Siblings – several issues can influence

the provision of care, such as marital status, financial security, and where the siblings live in relation to their parents.

2. Competition – competing for parent approval hinders the sharing of responsibility and increases the level of frustration. Siblings must work through their past emotions to properly care for their parents.

3. Differences that divide-coping styles vary; one sibling obsesses over the illness of mom while another withdraws or avoids the situation.

4. Power plays – flexibility and power sharing show strength. Not only are sibling relationships enhanced, elderly parents are better served, as well.

5. Respecting boundaries – optimal boundaries are permeable so that siblings respect each other's privacy but call on each other in times of need.

6. Taking on the burden – asking for help in the care-giving role can be thought of as a weakness. Those siblings who take on too much can feel resentment toward those who are not volunteering their time to help.

We've all been there – you visit or call on a regular basis, but is it noticed? When you find yourself reacting to a situation with your siblings and /or your aging parents, take a moment to check and see if you are reacting out of any of these emotional minefields: guilt and helplessness, anger and resentment, or sorrow and grief. Ask everyone involved

to examine their motives to help realize what they are feeling and why. It sometimes takes a conscious act of doing this to not slip into one of these traps. Remember – our parents know how to push these buttons – they installed them; our siblings have watched for many years and they know how to push them, as well.

A family meeting can be a significant tool to use in working with your siblings and your parents. Recruit friends and family to help with the care giving. Sometimes it will be just you, and that is not enough to go around. You need to have occasional relief, and you may find that you need to request specific help for some very specific things. Part of taking care of your aging parent is taking care of yourself.

In order to maintain a healthful mindset, keep the following twelve steps in mind:

- Take five
- Shift gears
- The worry hour
- Love to laugh
- Get some perspective
- Take action
- Avoid the Coulda-shoulda-wouldas
- Pursue other interests
- Spiritual support
- Mediatation, massage, relaxation
- Indulgent necessities
- Involve professionals in the field •