

Healthy Mind: Coping with the Sandwich Years

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Healthy Mind: Coping with the Sandwich Years

(oh yeah, and COVID)

Stuck in the Middle



Sandwiched

- Intergenerational caregiving
- High level demands across multiple domains
 - Responsibilities outside of the home have increased
 - Responsibilities at home have remained the same or increased
 - Your personal resource has remained the same or is reduced (age, stress, health etc)

A case study

- Mid 50's female, post graduate, professional
 - New professional roles: new job, recently elected to state professional board, volunteer work
 - Married, older spouse still working
 - Child: son, aged 18, mental health and learning issues
senior in high school, transitioning to college
 - Parents: Mother died a year ago.
 - Father, mid 80s, transitioned to assisted living
 - House prepared for sale
 - COVID: impact across the board
 - Negative Health Outcomes
 - Insulin resistance, arthritis, autoimmune dz, depression

Sandwiched Women

- 15% of women in the US, midlife
 - Tend to be married, affluent, educated
 - Financial and emotional support to children
 - Time and physical support to parents
 - Child care provided to grandchildren
 - Continuing to engage in professional role
- These data are consistent across industrialized countries
- *Represents a significant, chronic life stressor*
 - *Worse before it gets better*

Midlife Health Concerns

- Central adiposity
 - Metabolic syndrome
 - CVD
 - Inflammation
 - Immune system changes
- Sleep disturbances
- Fatigue
- Trouble with memory or concentration
- *All negatively influenced by chronic stress*

Protective Factors

- **Connectedness**
- Managing Stress
- Diet
- Physical Activity
- Sleep

Connectedness

- *A faithful friend is the medicine of life*



Connectedness

- Connectedness
 - Affiliation has survival value
 - Child rearing
 - Biology
 - Estrogen (serotonin) and oxytocin VS adrenalin and cortisol
 - Tend and Befriend
 - Buffers the negative effects of stress hormones

BeFriend

- Quality of relationship is important
 - The stress associated with coercive or abusive relationships is more stressful for women
 - Emotional abuse or physical abuse
 - *Goal: Reciprocity and Parity*
 - Unmitigated communion
 - Caregiver risk
 - Focus on other to the exclusion of the self
 - Fail to request support
 - Fails to receive support when it is requested
 - Associated with negative physical and emotional health outcomes
 - *Goal: Clear communication of expectations*
 - *Goal: Limit setting (availability, tasks, finances)*

Protective Factors

- Connectedness
- **Managing Stress**
- Diet
- Physical Activity
- Sleep

Managing Stress

- Resource < Demand: Appraisal
- Prediction and Control

Stress = An imbalance between demands and resources

Demands



Eustress vs Distress

- The optimal stress curve



Stress

- Acute Stress: Physical activation
 - Fight-flight or freeze
 - Focus on the stressor
 - Priming the body for activity
- Chronic Stress: Costly
 - Negative health outcomes
 - CVD, inflammation, immune system impact
 - Negative mental health outcomes
 - Depression, anxiety, addiction

The COVID Factor

- Amplifier
- Chronic/Persistent Stressor
 - Lack of control
 - Uncertainty
 - Lack of efficacy

Strategies for Coping

- Protect Resources: What can you control?
 - Limit exposures to anything that drains resources
 - Establish routines that includes restorative time
 - Values
 - Purpose
 - Support through Connectedness
- Emotional Awareness
 - Anger, Grief, Helplessness are all expected responses
 - Increasing positive emotions
- Manage Expectations
 - It's all new – we have no experience with this event
 - Prioritizing
 - Maslow's Hierarchy: we are functioning at the bottom 2 levels. Forget self actualization!

Values

Your values are deeply personal and uniquely yours.

They are the things that you consider to be important and meaningful in the way that you choose to live your life.

They define your moral purpose in life.

You will naturally find yourself drawn to people, ideas, events, etc., that align with your values, and they will inspire you to take action accordingly.



Maslow's hierarchy of needs

Strategies for Coping

- Most importantly
 - Go gently
 - Be kind to yourself

The image features a background of thin, vertical, light blue lines of varying lengths and positions, creating a textured, rain-like effect. A solid teal horizontal bar spans the width of the image, positioned in the lower half. The text "Thank you" is centered within this bar in a white, bold, sans-serif font. Below the teal bar is a thin yellow line, and at the very bottom is a light gray gradient bar.

Thank you