

Guest Post: Mother's Day: 10 Mother-Daughter Caregiving Relationships Tips

by

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Mother's Day ceased to be an annual event for me over 20 years ago. When I had a mother I took for granted that she would be with me forever. On Mother's Day, I watch mothers and daughters and granddaughters celebrate. I hope that all realize the value of this existing relationship and how quickly it can disappear as the result of a change in health or unexpected accident.

When I did have my mother, I was oblivious to aspects of caregiving that I could have supported but did not. Mothers caregive for daughters; it is not usually the other way around until mom becomes old and frail. Below are ideas to consider that support a close relationship and the potential idea of a future caregiving relationship as you spend time with your mother on Mother's Day and throughout the year:

1. Don't assume mom has it all together—suggest ways you might help. I did not discover, until after my mother's death, that she couldn't balance a checkbook. She appeared to manage the family money well; she paid the bills, saved money, and all seemed to have it all together. I helped with the annual income taxes. I certainly could have helped balance the monthly checkbook if I had known this was a skill she did not possess. I never thought to ask. For some reason, I ignored all those slight mentions about managing money, because I thought she had it all together. Don't assume that your mom can do everything that you can do - ask and suggest how you might help in a wide variety of areas.
2. Get rid of 40+ years of accumulation—now! Those bedrooms with the doors permanently closed, the basement full of stuff, drawers full of rubber bands, lead pencils etc. It's not going anywhere and hasn't for the past 40 years. Offer to help mom clean out rooms, closets, and the basement. If she wanted to do it she would have already done it - cleaning out years of accumulated items isn't fun. Find a way to clear out excess items and make the time enjoyable!
3. Help with hobbies and favorite activities. My mom loved to garden and make canned goods. Carrying the heavy Mason jars, shopping to purchase jar lids, skinning tomatoes, fruits, and other vegetables became more challenging as mom grew older. Support your mom in beloved activities by providing the manual labor and doing the heavy lifting. Time together is precious and if you have children you might have them join in and learn family recipes and a skills that are becoming a memory of the past.
4. Talk about what IF dad dies first? My mom frequently expressed concern about how she would support herself financially if my dad died first. Her children, me included, ignored this conversation saying that the men always die first. We didn't talk about her worries or her concerns. While your parents are both still healthy, have these conversations to bring concerns out into the open. While you're at it have the discussion about what you would do if your husband or significant other dies first—or if you have no children, who will care for you?
5. Who do you trust? Everyone needs a trusted individual to serve as financial power of attorney, medical power of attorney, and personal representative. Talk about legal planning in advance of illness or disability. Talk to your mom about who she would want to serve as this individual even if it is an outside professional. Then think about the same for yourself—and complete the documents.

6. Spoil mom—just a little bit. Many of us have things that we'd like to do or like to have but we don't want to spend the money. Buy your mom a good pair of walking shoes, pay for a housekeeping service, or send her to the spa for a day. Sometimes it's nice to enjoy things that we'd like to do but we might be too frugal to spend the money (or may not have the money to spend).
7. Host the family gathering. Offer to host the Mother's Day gathering at your home rather than mom hosting. This allows mom to "show-up" rather than to have to grocery shop, plan, cook, and clean up. Involve her grandchildren in the effort and have them make a special dessert or other part of the meal. Make it a family effort, rather than a mom effort.
8. Talk about the hot potato - money! Many fail to realize that traditional Medicare or health insurance does not pay for the type of care many of us will need as we age. While Mother's Day may not be the perfect day to broach this subject, talk about money with mom. Do your parents have a financial plan? Do they have a financial planner? Have they considered long term care insurance? Many of our parents were not exposed to these aspects when they were young and many simply don't know or understand the benefits. This is one area where your education and knowledge may be very beneficial to your mother and your father and to you as a potential future caregiver.
9. Get technology literate. Many older adults avoid technology. Research shows that those who learn to use technology become more socially connected. Help your mom purchase a computer and learn how to surf the Internet, use email, and Skype. Get the grandchildren involved in this effort so that they can communicate with grandma—and teach grandma (and grandpa) new skills. Make technology literacy a family project so that communication occurs more than once a year on Mother's Day but is ongoing.
10. Plan early for the holidays. The holidays can be stressful especially when one feels the obligation to purchase expensive presents. Plan early and help mom identify things that she might make (canned goods, cookies, etc.) rather than feeling burdened to spend money. Put together family recipes that might be typed and put into a booklet that is distributed to family. Go through family photos and have them scanned to make an album for all to enjoy. Give consideration to more traditional gift ideas rather than spending money on items that will be obsolete in a short period of time.

Many parents need help but are afraid to ask—adult children are busy with careers, raising family, and other projects. Family time is precious and rare, especially if family lives at a distance. By using one of the simple ideas above you have the opportunity to support your mother (and perhaps even your father) with an enjoyable or valuable activity that may have a significant effect on present well-being or future caregiving relationships.

Pamela D. Wilson, MS, BS/BA, CG, CSA, Certified Senior Advisor specializes in working with family and professional caregivers to navigate healthcare and aging concerns. Wilson, an expert in the field of caregiving, has personally helped thousands of family and professional caregivers since 2000 in her career as an advocate, a care navigator, and an educator. Through her company, The Care Navigator, she is an advocate and service provider in the roles of guardian, power of attorney, care manager, and transition specialist. She was producer and host of The Caring Generation®, from 2009 to 2011, an educational radio program for caregivers on 630 KHOW-AM. In addition to her work at the Care Navigator, Pamela gives back to the community by serving as chairperson of the Community Ethics Committee in Denver, Colorado.

*Her new book, *The Caregiving Trap: Solutions for Life's Unexpected Changes*, will be available on October 6, 2015 through all major bookstores as well as on PamelaDWilson.com. You can find her on [YouTube](#), [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [Linked In](#).*

