

I can't quite remember when I first heard the term 'baby boomer' but it is part of the vernacular now. The term refers to a population growth set in motion at the end of the Second World War, levelling off in Canada around 1966.

Currently, the baby boomer generation is the driving force of our society. Boomers hold leadership roles in industry and government with an optimism unmatched by previous generations. Boomers are living longer and healthier with a huge appetite for what life has to offer. It sounds good on paper doesn't it? Well, as with most things there is a challenging side.

Boomers are faced with responsibilities that are unique to their generation. This is the workaholic generation with the can-do attitude and there is a lot to do. Family relationships alone can be a full-time job. Baby boomers are more likely to have at least one parent living who requires care and attention, as well as one or more children over 18 who need various kinds of support including financial. Hence the somewhat whimsical term 'sandwich generation.' Surveys indicate that 29% of baby boomers have a primary role in financially supporting aging parents and 68% are primary or secondary financial contributors to their adult children, in some cases at the same time. My suggestion to those providing substantial funds to adult children is to take a good look at the accountability issue (but that's another column!).

When it comes to supporting aging parents though, the responsibilities and the challenges are real. The kind of support needed runs the full spectrum and continues to change until the parent dies. It can be anything from frequent visits to the home, dealing with health-care systems or taking care of finances and bill paying to providing full-time primary care to an incapacitated parent.

A recent Canadian poll found that 57% of adults between the ages of 41 and 60 believe that it is their responsibility to care for a parent in the caregivers home. This is admirable but some elderly people need to be in a specialized environment with all of the support that this implies.

Approaching a senior about moving into a care facility can be anywhere from delicate to traumatic. Some of the indicators that it is time to move are an increase in balance issues (falling), poor nutrition, difficulty with hygiene, mental confusion and forgetfulness (stove is left on), or increased isolation, to name a few.

Like all of us, seniors need activity. Even though capacity may be limited, be creative about providing stimulus other than repeats of Judge Judy. There is an epidemic of depression and loneliness among the elderly. The key is to listen, be respectful, share your life and most of all take care of yourself so you can take care of your beloved parent.

Deborah Joyce is the Executive Director of District 69 Family Resource Association serving children, youth and families in Oceanside. Contact her at 250-752-6766.