



## **Children, Parents and Role Reversal**

A recent survey by the National Alliance for Caregiving and the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) found that an estimated 22.4 million U.S. households, or nearly one in four, are currently providing or have provided care in the past 12 months to someone age 50 or older.

By definition, role reversal occurs any time aging parents are cared for by their adult children, and the chances of adult children becoming caregivers for their parents will increase more and more over time. Frequently the role of “caregiver” is thrust upon us suddenly and without time to prepare. Other times, a decline in health or acute illness and prolonged hospital stay will give the new caregivers a few weeks time to adjust to their new role.

There are varying degrees of acceptance of these new roles, which are influenced by the suddenness and severity of the changes that need to be made. The personal impact for all involved can run the gamut of emotions and may wreak havoc on what formerly was a normal family life.

Navigating this new territory and balancing the care giving responsibilities for your parents will be both a difficult and rewarding time. Many families have provided wonderful care and support for their parents, and these parents have experienced the love and support of families to help them handle the many challenges of aging. Here are some ways to manage role reversal:

- Keep communications open between all family members involved
- Be sure to keep the older adult included in all decisions.
- Whenever possible, allow the older adult to maintain the highest degree of independence. Assistance is good, but control may hinder recovery.
- Recognize the many emotions of each party, both the older adult parent and you, the adult child caregiver. If your relationship allows, talk it through.
- Use the resources and people that are trained to help caregivers. Use non-skilled support and private duty and take a break.
- Take care of yourself; if you are well rested and healthy you will be able to ward off stress and feelings of being overwhelmed.
- Stay in regular contact with your medical professionals; ask questions and solicit advice about caring for parents.

If you have questions about support for adult children and their aging parents, please call Dana O’Donnell, Director of Liberty at Home, Home Health, at 215-643-6496 or visit [www.libertyathome.org](http://www.libertyathome.org).