

Life, Work & Family

Monthly work/life news for UAW-Represented DaimlerChrysler Workers

August 2005

Brought to you by the Circle of Life Committee 1-800-809-4996

In This Issue:

BACK-TO-SCHOOL NIGHT BASICS.....	1
COMMUNICATING WITH YOUR AGING PARENT.....	2
EMPTY NEST SYNDROME.....	4



Back-to-School Night Basics

If a picture is worth a thousand words, then visiting in person must equal about a million. That's why most schools host back-to-school nights shortly after the beginning of the year. Take advantage of this opportunity to see the world your child inhabits every day and meet the people in charge. It's one of the best ways to begin to build that all-important home-school connection.



What to Expect

When: Schools usually schedule the event for a weekday evening within a month of the first day of school.

Who: You'll be able to meet your child's teachers and aides, the principal, nurse, and other staff members, and of course your fellow parents. Unless otherwise specified, this is an adults-only night, so book a sitter.

Where: The evening typically begins with an introduction in the auditorium or gymnasium. Then you'll separate into groups and spend the evening with your child's teacher/s. More adventurous organizers may have a school scavenger hunt or some other explore-and-tour the school activity as well -- be a good sport and get into the adventure if asked!

What: The event gives you a glimpse of your child's daily life at school and an opportunity to learn about the curriculum. You can also sign up to join the PTA or other parent group.

Why: Research shows that parent involvement in schools helps students achieve more and schools thrive. And joining the PTA is a great way to have a voice in school issues and decisions.

Visiting the Classroom

Many teachers will have you sit in your child's seat. It makes it easier for them to keep track of which child goes with which parent -- especially since a parent may not share the same last name as her child. Plus, you get the opportunity to see the world of the classroom as your child does every day.

Once you've gathered, your child's teacher will introduce herself and give an overview of students' daily routines, schedules, goals, and activities -- some of this may already be written on the blackboard when you get there so the teacher can dive right into the meat of things. She will also discuss her homework policy, discipline plan, and any other important information such as if she maintains a classroom homepage and how to contact her.

The lengthiest part of the evening will be spent going over the curriculum and the methods the teacher will use to reach the year's goals. If your child has several teachers for different subjects, you may go from classroom to classroom doing this, usually in the same order your child would, so you experience a mini-day of school.

For each subject, the teacher will outline the standards that he hopes to achieve that year and have the books he'll use available for you to review. If your child will need specific supplies for any special projects, you'll find out about that as well. The teacher will discuss how grades will be determined and may show examples of previous students' work so you can get a clear picture of what 'A' or 'S' work looks like compared to 'C' or 'U' work.

At each point, your child's teacher will likely stop and take any questions you have about the world of the classroom. Now's your chance to ask general questions and to clarify anything you find confusing. However, this is not a time to discuss your child's individual needs or progress -- save that for parent/teacher conferences when the teacher knows your child better and can talk with you one-on-one.

*™ and © 2003-1996 Scholastic Inc. All rights reserved.
SCHOLASTIC and associated logos are trademarks of Scholastic Inc.*

Communicating with Your Aging Parent



Communication is crucial

One of the greatest challenges caregivers face is establishing constructive communication. Years of personal history have gone into creating the relationship you have with your parent. So, it shouldn't be surprising that a sudden or unexpected need for care can impact your relationship. While taking the time to discuss care needs is important, reaching a comfortable dialogue can be difficult.

Caregivers and those needing care (care recipients) come from different perspectives and have different needs. Care recipients often are struggling with the loss of former independence and may feel powerless or angry. In contrast, caregivers struggle with their own emotional, physical and financial strain and are easily overwhelmed. Most caregivers must walk an uneasy line between "advising" and "taking over." At the center of this divide is a strong need to communicate. Discussing sensitive issues is hard since many of us have never talked with our parents about medical care, housing options or financial issues. However, if you can open things up, you stand a better chance of making decisions and plans that will work best for both of you.

Caregiving limitations

Caregivers need to come to terms with their limitations. It's essential to understand that while you are providing a critical service to your parent, it's not your life. Remember that a parent who needs assistance is an adult, not a child. For example, having your parent move in with you may provide you with peace of mind, but it may not be what your parent wants. Again, communication can come to the rescue.

Be a better communicator, be a better caregiver

Quality of life is a central concern for any older adult. Learn what your parent wants as well as what concerns or frightens her. Talk, listen and share. Here are a few tips that can help facilitate the communication exchange:

- Set some time aside to talk with your parent when you won't be interrupted and you are both rested and prepared.
- Encourage your parent to talk and avoid interrupting or criticizing.
- Speak clearly and ask one question at a time.
- Have patience and allow sufficient time for a response.
- Encourage your parent to express any concerns and fears (large or small) about needing assistance.
- Don't worry if "feelings" interrupt your agenda. Expressing feelings is part of the process.
- Be considerate but candid regarding medical prognosis, financial issues, or other topics that must be addressed - including your ability to help.
- Encourage your parent to make independent decisions for as long possible. Offer support and communicate that you are available to assist.
- Listen attentively; don't dismiss good two-way communication.
- End the discussion as soon as you or your parent start feeling tired or threatened.

If you can't make headway in speaking constructively, consider getting help from someone else. You can suggest involving another person in the family with whom your parent feels more confident. Or, try a larger family gathering by holding a family meeting. Alternately, professional support may be available from a geriatric care manager who can help facilitate care planning and arranging services.

Issues for discussion

Try not to overdo it. Recent research on successful aging, sponsored by the MacArthur Foundation, found that control over one's life is key to mental and physical health. When communicating with your aging parent, make recommendations, not decisions. Help where help is needed, but don't do what she can do for herself. Here are some core issues to address:

- Identify your parent's primary concerns.
- Ask your parent how important it is to remain at home and if other options would be acceptable.
- Ask about your parent's financial situation and whether something like home care (which is likely not to be covered by insurance or Medicare) would be affordable.
- If you're planning for future (rather than current) needs, you might also inquire about your parent's long term care coverage.

Determine what legal planning your parent has done. Or, discuss contacting an experienced attorney who specializes in elder law. Legal issues may include:

- Finding out if your parent has a valid and updated will.
- Establishing a durable power of attorney for assets which designates a person, usually a family member, to make legally binding decisions in case your parent becomes incapacitated.
- Establishing a separate durable power of attorney for health care in order to authorize another person to make health care decisions, in case of later incapacity.
- Starting the conversation about "advanced directives" such as a living will or do-not-resuscitate order which spell out a your parent's wishes and medical care instructions regarding life-sustaining or "heroic" procedures.
- Knowing where all legal documents are filed. And, if possible, making a list of what documents exist and where they are, in case they need to be accessed in an emergency.

Do a little homework, be prepared

Good communication will minimize future "surprises" in arranging care. In addition, stay ahead of what's happening, get organized and educated. Create a master phone list of friends, doctors, agencies, etc. Learn about your parent's ailments. If you're apart during the day, identify other people who can look in on your parent. Being more informed will help you feel better about your ability to cope with care needs down the road.

Copyright ©1998-2003. CareGuide.com. All Rights Reserved.

Empty Nest Syndrome

Have the lives of your children so filled your life that the realization that they'll soon be gone leaves you sad? This is what the empty nest syndrome is all about. It signifies a new stage in your life.

A Women's Issue

The empty nest syndrome affects women more than men, although fathers also have to deal with the change. The syndrome was a common crisis years ago when most mothers stayed home full time. Their lives revolved around their children and making their home a haven. They were identified as someone's wife or mother. Who they were was closely linked to their family role. When their children left, many felt empty and lost because they felt useless.



Times have changed, and the vast majority of women rejoin the work force before their children leave home. This gives women the chance to find stimulating work inside and outside of the home. Women have options to develop their own identity, unlike past generations. Today's full-time homemakers are also better at developing their own identity and don't necessarily fall prey to the syndrome.

Your feelings about your children leaving are probably mixed. You're a little relieved to have some privacy, quiet and time to develop your own interests. But you also feel sad because the children you loved and nurtured are leaving, and you don't remember life without them. You also worry about your children's safety. See this process as a fact that you're aging, and know that there will be some emptiness from losing the daily responsibility for these cherished human beings.

How to Cope

The most important thing is to develop your own identity throughout your child-rearing years. It's important to give yourself space and time. Set personal goals that don't involve your family. Take art classes, try your hand at writing or read a book a week.

It's essential to spend time together as a couple while rearing your children. You don't want to wonder who that stranger is in your bed and forget the reason you chose him for a mate. If all you ever talked about was the kids, that mistake will

haunt you now. You may find a marriage encounter group helpful or take time to renew your marriage through intimate talks to freshen the romance.

It helps to realize that letting go is a gradual process. The nest will not be truly empty because there will be many family events in the future. They will be different than your life before, but still pleasurable. It must be noted that the nest is often refilled in our society. If your children come home to roost again, or your aging parents need care, it can refill your nest just as you begin to enjoy your freedom.

When to Seek Help

If you're trying to learn about who you are, and feel great loss and depression at the thought of change, you could benefit from professional counsel. You're at a great time in your life to open new doors. If you can only count up the losses and are unable to take pleasure in the pluses, it's time to get help in redirecting your life.

Distributed under license. © Parlay International