

Parenting a Difficult Adult

Ashley Miller

Dealing with difficult adult children can be a real challenge. Perhaps you'd like them to visit more often or you feel like they don't take your needs into account. Or maybe they take advantage of your generosity.

While your adult children—hopefully—have lives of their own and might not have as much time for you as you'd like, you don't need to—and shouldn't have to—tolerate inconsiderate behavior. There's no need to engage in family warfare or cut them out of your life, but finding balance and learning alternative ways of interacting may help preserve your relationship.

Some Solutions

1. Reframe your expectations. Perhaps you're asking for the same level of interaction you had when your children were younger, and that's just no longer possible. Limiting your expectations may help you avoid disappointment in certain cases, such as when your children fail to call or visit.
2. Explain what you will and will not tolerate. Parents of adult children should demonstrate and ask for reciprocal respect. If your children are rude, obnoxious, or inconsiderate, put your foot down and let them know that you won't tolerate their behavior. At the same time, you should respect your adult children—mutual respect can help heal your relationship, but it may take time to work

3. Communicate your feelings and open up a positive, constructive dialogue. Every family has issues—perhaps there are unresolved concerns from the past that your children are still holding over your head, or vice versa. If necessary, apologize for any previous wrongdoing on your part, but then let the past stay in the past. Be willing to let go of and move on from past hurts to have a healthy relationship with your adult children.
4. Live your own life. When you live a full and happy life, your adult children might be more likely to want to spend time with you.
5. Maintain healthy boundaries. If your adult children keep asking for money or a place to stay, it's up to you to set the limits that you feel comfortable with. Don't make excuses for their behavior. If your children are taking advantage of you, it's because they can.