Most of the articles in Senior Sense target the needs and interests of our core readership—adults who are providing care for adult partners or seniors in their lives. In this article, we discuss the issues of a special group of caregivers: teens and even younger children.

According to a 2005 report from the National Alliance for Caregiving and the United Hospital Fund, 1.4 million children ages 8 to 18 provide care for an adult relative; 72% are caring for a parent or grandparent, and 64% live in the same household as their care receiver. Fortunately, most are not the sole caregiver.

Most people agree that, to make a household work well, everyone needs to pitch in. Everyone has tasks and chores, according to their talents, interests and abilities. In the best circumstances, someone in the family is able to handle anything that needs to be done. When that is not possible, and there is money available, we often hire others to handle everything from yard work to meal preparation and transportation.

Children have an important role to play in this. Young children are often able to help sort clothes for the laundry, pick up toys and spend time with

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senior family members. Schoolage children have skills for more complex tasks, and most teens can handle many adult tasks.

Children differ from adult caregivers in some important ways, of course. Since children lack the maturity and life experience of adults, children are usually less able to deal with the stress that often comes with senior caregiving. While every caregiving situation is unique, many do involve responsibilities that are beyond a typical child’s physical and emotional development.

When children and young teens provide caregiving for a parent, the typical parent-child roles get reversed. Instead of parents being caregivers for children, children become the caregivers. Some children are able to rise to the occasion and fulfill this new role well. They tend to “grow up in a hurry,” taking on adult-like interactions and responsibilities. Depending on the child, this pressure to take on adult responsibilities can be beneficial to the child’s growth, or it can create more pressure than the child can handle. In the latter case, children may deal with their stress by acting out, doing worse at school, escaping into music or video games, or similar coping behaviors. Children can often recover from caregiving stress that is short-term. Long-term caregiving can result in personality changes in children that can last into their own adulthood.

How can you help make caregiving a positive experience for children? First, communicate regularly with the child. If he resents caregiving, he may feel guilty about that and gloss over sharing his real feelings. Nurture a relationship where he will share his genuine feelings without fear of repercussions. Answer his questions as truthfully as you can. Calm his fears. Don’t ask the child to take on caregiving responsibilities that the adult can still manage. Finally, recognize that the child may be experiencing a kind of subconscious grief – grief at the loss of some of his independence and innocence.

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 Telephone service is as essential as food, water, and a place to live. Whether through a land line, a cell

Housing Beware of Telephone Scams

Telephone service is as essential as food, water, and a place to live. Whether through a land line, a cell
phone, or both, this vital resource keeps us connected to family, friends, and coworkers. Our phones enable us to get help in an emergency, shop for goods and services, and even vote for our favorite reality show contestants.

The convenience of telephone service works both ways. Charitable organizations, politicians, pollsters, and businesses rely on phone calls to reach consumers. Unfortunately, so do con artists. Telling the difference between a legitimate and a fraudulent call can be a challenge.

Adding your number to the National Do Not Call registry may reduce unwanted calls. From the phone you wish to add, call 1-888-382-1222. You can also register online at www.donotcall.gov. Charities, politicians, and businesses you currently have a relationship with are exempt.

Listing your number with the National Do Not Call registry does NOT protect you from fraudulent callers. Legitimate businesses check the registry and are subject to fines for calling numbers on the list. Consumers still need to beware of con artists.

Robocalls saying you owe money to a government entity, utility, or business are scams. These calls often encourage you to press one now to talk to a representative. Just hang up.

Never provide your personal information or credit card number to a caller you do not know. Legitimate businesses and government agencies bill through the mail. Unless you have recently moved, they should have your address. Request a statement of the charges be sent to you.

Fraudulent callers will encourage you to act immediately. The deal they have to offer is only available now. Pushing for your credit card or bank account number is a red flag.

Calls about prizes or free trips you have won are often scams too. Did you even register for the prize? If the caller asks for your credit card number, hang up. You should not have to pay anything for a free prize.

A new twist on telephone fraud is a call from a friend or family member—often a grandchild—in distress. A bad connection and/or loud background noise is common. They claim to have gotten into trouble while traveling out of the country and need money wired to them to rectify the situation so they can come back home.

If you get this kind of call, verify
the identity and location of the grandchild. Hang up and call the grandchild using the number you normally use to reach them, or call another family member who can confirm your grandchild is out of the country.

Most telephones come with CallerID. If you do not recognize the number, let it ring. If the call was important, they will leave a message or call back again.

Telephone fraud is alive and well. Adding your number to the National Do Not Call registry may reduce unwanted calls, but offers no protection from con artists. When in doubt, just hang up.

**Nutrition Safe Use of Alcohol**

Do you enjoy an “adult” beverage sometimes? Many people do, but we need to be careful about not drinking too much. The Dietary Guidelines state that that women should limit their intake to 1 drink or less per day and men should consume two drinks or less per day. One drink equals 12 ounces of beer, 5 ounces of wine, 8-9 ounces of malt liquor and 1½ ounces of hard liquor. Many drinks are much larger than this, so you may be drinking more than you realize.

Excess intake of alcohol can increase risk for some kinds of cancer, liver damage, and brain damage and hurt your immune system. It can also raise your blood pressure and increase risk for ulcers. People with diabetes may also be more likely to have low blood sugar reactions if they do not eat when they drink. Osteoporosis is more common in women who drink larger amounts.

If you take any medicine, be sure it is safe for you to drink alcohol. Your doctor or pharmacist can tell you whether you need to avoid alcohol when taking a prescription or over-the-counter drug. Even cold medicine and pain relievers should not be mixed with alcohol. Some medicines like cough syrup already contain alcohol so you do not want to add more. Definitely avoid alcohol if you take antidepressants or sleeping pills. Some people think a “night cap” will help them sleep better. While it can relax you, alcohol actually disturbs sleep. Other ways to promote sleep like moderate exercise earlier in the day, not napping and relaxing baths are much better.

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To prevent drinking too much, the National Institutes of Health recommend:

- Count how many ounces you get in each drink.
- Keep track of how many drinks you have per day.
- Decide how many days a week you will drink. Plan some alcohol-free days.
- Drink only 1 alcoholic drink per hour. Substitute water, juice or sugar-free soda.
- Eat when you drink. This slows down how quickly alcohol enters your system.

If you think you drink too much:

- Get support from your family and your health care providers to stop.
- Develop other interests that don’t involve alcohol.
- Plan what you will do if you do have an urge to drink.
- Learn to say “no thanks” when you are offered a drink.
- Make a decision to stay healthy for the important things in your life like grandchildren or a special event or trip.

Please see page 6 for a great mock-tail recipe!

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Some people think a “night cap” will help them sleep better. While it can relax you, alcohol actually disturbs sleep.
Key West Mock-Tail
Here is a good drink to serve at your next party.

4 large kiwis, peeled and chopped  
2 large mangos, peeled and chopped  
16 ounces pineapple-orange juice  
3 cups ice cold sparkling water

1. Puree the kiwi and mango with the juice in a blender.  
2. Pour into a pitcher. Mix in the ice cold water.  
   Garnish glasses with mint or orange slices.

Serves 8

Nutrition Analysis:
Calories: 86
Fat: Less than half a gram
Sodium: 4 mg
Carbohydrates: 22 gm
Saturated Fat: 0 gm
Fiber: 2 gm
Protein: 0.5 gm
Cholesterol: 0 gm

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