

Are you raising your children, looking after your parents, holding down a full-time job, maintaining a relationship, staying on top of life, all while never speaking out about your struggles?

Are you one of the silent generation?

It must be really hard? The words were simple, but they reduced Gita Trevorrow-Seymour to tears. She was never one to complain about her situation – but to have her sister acknowledge, from the other side of the world, just how difficult life must be meant a lot.

'My husband Tim and I have two children, Iain, now seven, and Marlowe, five,' Gita explains. 'Nine years ago, my mum Ella moved into our flat in North London. She had retired and was deciding what to do next, but she was then diagnosed with Parkinson's and so ended up staying with us.'

Gita, 47, is a typical member of the sandwich – and silent, generation. She runs her own business, while dealing with the

complex priorities of both her mum and her children.

'There are some really poignant moments, like when I'm teaching Marlowe to do her shoelaces, then I'll have to tie up Mum's. Or Iain will be struggling with his buttons, while Mum is, too.'

'It's a situation full of emotional, physical and logistical challenges. If I'm helping the children with homework, and Mum shouts for me, I don't know who needs my help most. If I do go to Mum, she'll quite often have forgotten what she wanted me for, which can be frustrating.'

'And while I'm seeing it from my point of view, caught in the middle, I'm also always aware of how Mum must be feeling, becoming far less independent. It's a delicate position to be in.'

Gita is far from alone. About three per cent of the UK population is providing care for more than one generation, according to Athena Vlachantoni, a gerontologist at the University of Southampton. It sounds low – but it's actually over two million people.

And with people having babies later and living longer, the pressure on the sandwich generation is only intensifying.

As most care falls to women, they're now contending with full-time jobs, looking after dependent children and parents with failing health. Throw in a relationship to maintain, friendships to sustain, as well as general life admin, that's a lot of balls in the air. And while they're juggling, the person who suffers most? Themselves. Not only do they rarely 'take any me-time', they don't even talk about their struggles.

'It's a conversation that just isn't being had,' Gita says.

One woman, however, who is determined to get women talking is Katie Taylor. With four children aged between 18 and 24 and parents in their 80s, she's very much part of the silent, sandwich generation.

'During lockdown, my father

had a heart attack,' she says. 'And at the same time, one of my children was mentally unwell. I felt pulled in a million directions – who needed me

diagnosis and with HHT, was on the road to recovery. But her experiences opened her eyes and she realised no one is focusing on the woman in the

'Seek help, there are so many places out there'

the most? It's like a pressure cooker. The demands on you at this age are like no other point in your life.'

'The 52-year-old from London also believes another factor contributes to the stress on women in their 40s and 50s. *The menopause*. 'My menopause was misdiagnosed as depression,' explains Katie. 'Without knowing what was going on and my hormones dropping rapidly, I struggled to cope. I had to leave my job and turned into a hermit.'

'Thankfully, after four years, Katie managed to get a correct

middle. Not even themselves. 'That's why she set up latte lounge.co.uk – an online community for women over 40, which provides support, information and signposting for midlife health and wellbeing.

'I couldn't believe the response I got,' says Katie. 'Thousands of women would email in the middle of the night, when everyone else was asleep, with nowhere else to go with their feelings. Some were feeling suicidal.'

'So what can these women do to improve their lives?'

'If you feel you aren't coping, make sure your hormones are balanced and you take care of any health conditions you have,' urges Katie. 'When

you're unwell, you can't look after others. Exercise and eat well. I work from home, so I get a dog – the perfect excuse for a walk in the fresh air and to see other people.'

'Also, seek help. There are so many places out there – and latte lounge.co.uk has a huge list, for whatever you're going through.'

Gita has put her skills as founder of people development company, High Definition You, into ensuring that she remains one of her priorities.

'I create blocks of time in my diary to ensure I spend time with Mum every day and that I'm in for the children getting home from school – and I also put time aside for myself,' she says. 'Some days, I get up early and do a bit of yoga. Other days, I'll stay in bed – and won't feel guilty about it.'

'I've also stopped "shoulding" all over myself, as I put it. Whenever I start thinking, "I should have spent more time with the children", or, "I should have gone shopping with Mum", I stop myself. I'm doing the best I can.'

Rather than an optimist or a pessimist, Gita describes herself as a 'possiblist' – she does what is possible and reminds herself that doesn't mean doing everything.

'It's important to stay in the moment – a lot of our feelings of overwhelm come from mentally time-travelling to what we wish we did more differently in the past, or what we worry about for the future.'

'I also practise gratitude daily. I feel grateful, for example, that Mum lives with us – the worry of her living alone would be far greater. 'Not only does it make you appreciate what you have, it changes the patterns in your brain, so you can process things with greater compassion.'

But the most important thing to do, to Katie, is to start talking.

● Latte Lounge is hosting themidlife festival.com from 11-15 October

For many, it's a time to "unzip it"

Gita with her mum, Ella



Katie intends to get women talking



Gita Trevorrow-Seymour and all the family