

Taking Care of Parents

Charlotte is a senior in an Ivy League college, and has a job at a top financial firm waiting for her when she graduates. She is extremely bright and motivated, and she is very excited about the next stage of her life. However, her family life in recent years has been troubled. Charlotte is an only child and her parents divorced while she was a first-year in high school. Her father abandoned the family at that time and has not been supportive since, rarely and unpredictably checking in with Charlotte. She and her mother moved in with her mother's parents at the time of the divorce. Since then, Charlotte's mother has been financially irresponsible and emotionally unstable and unavailable. As a result, Charlotte's maternal grandparents became her primary caregivers in high school and her primary financial and emotional supports throughout college. Charlotte's grandparents have also supported her mother financially when she could not make ends meet. While at college, Charlotte drifted apart from her mother, and this has been a relief for Charlotte.

Charlotte's grandparents, whom she loves and respects very much, have begun to express growing concern about Charlotte's mother. They know that Charlotte's mother is irresponsible, both financially and as a parent, but they worry that as they age, they will no longer be able to afford to support her financially. They believe strongly in family loyalty, and they hope that Charlotte might be willing to provide her mother with at least a basic standard of living. Charlotte feels conflicted: She is excited about her new independence and does not want to be burdened by her mother's needs, but she also feels some sense of responsibility for the wellbeing of her mother and feels obligated to take seriously her grandparents' wishes.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. To what degree is Charlotte obligated to provide financial support to her mother?
2. To what degree is Charlotte obligated to obey her grandparents' wishes?
3. Is it morally permissible for Charlotte to refuse help to her mother?

