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Judith R. Smith | [JudithRSmith@Difficultmothering.com](mailto:JudithRSmith@Difficultmothering.com) | 917-885-9243 | [www.difficultmothering.com](http://www.difficultmothering.com)

Difficult: The untold story of mothering a challenging adult child, maternal ambivalence, and aging.

In this unflinching and invaluable new book, Dr. Judith R. Smith uses detailed case studies and social science research to illustrate the strain that occurs when older women unexpectedly have to resume their parenting career and re-open their homes to their adult children.

Dr. Smith coined the name "difficult adult child" after listening to 50 different women share stories of how their adult child's chronic unemployment, mental illness, or substance abuse created difficult or impossible choices for them as mothers. Each woman struggled with the conflict of whose needs take precedence – mine or my adult child's? These families have kept their pain, worry, and ambivalence hidden for too long, due to the stigma and shame linked with their adult children's failure to achieve. Their candid stories shine a light on the personal cost families experience when they become the default safety-net for their vulnerable adult children.

Smith's expertise in family policy and child development allows her to explore the personal and social effects of a system ill-equipped for dependent adult kids. She looks at the underfunded mental health system, the limits of the American welfare state, and how deeply women have internalized the mandate to be a "good mother" till the end.

Smith contends that a national dialogue is overdue — about the complex realities for older mothers who have found themselves mothering longer than they ever expected or wanted — into their fifties, sixties, even seventies. Who parents the struggling adult child? That's what this groundbreaking book tackles head on, and it's a revelation, an education, and for many who are struggling in silence, a lifeline.

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#### Praise for Difficult: Mothering Challenging Adult Children through Conflict and Change

This fine book will be profoundly helpful to all the women who needed it yesterday. At last, we have a book on the subject of difficult children that is profoundly sympathetic with and empathic toward mothers. It is excellent cultural therapy.

Mary Pipher, author of Reviving Ophelia and Women Rowing North

As a mother who lived with and lost an adult child with substance use issues, I found myself nodding my head while reading this book. My son Isaac struggled with his addiction for many years, and I always felt very alone. Difficult made me realize that so many mothers struggle as I did, and that there is not one right answer for everyone.

Eve Goldberg, mother and founder of BigVision.org

The difficulties of having an adult child with problems, particularly those who are mentally ill, abusing substances, or violent is often overlooked by mental health professionals, the media, and the public. Any mother with difficult children who reads this will undoubtedly no longer feel so alone. It is a book of despair and of hope, anger, and love.

Nancy R. Hooyman, Professor and Dean Social Work, University of Washington School of Social Work