



The Role of a Caregiver

Are you feeling drained and weighted down with the struggles of balancing your work, home life, and care for an aging parent or relative? Well, you aren't alone. More than one million older people in the United States are living in a multigenerational household. Which means that there are at least a million people who are in the same position as you, struggling to find a balance and keeping a positive attitude. A caregiver can be defined as someone who gives assistance to another person who is no longer able to perform the critical tasks of personal or household care necessary for everyday survival.

When making the decision whether or not to provide care, consider your readiness and that of your family's, to take on this role. Evaluate both the positive and negative aspects.

Taking on the role of caregiver may mean having to make changes in your social life, work schedules, stretching time and money, chronic fatigue, uncertainty of what the future holds, extra

strain on you, your family, and those you come into contact. Your family's lifestyle and your own, will change. It may mean less time to spend with your spouse or children, revised work and home schedules, increased emotional and physical stress which could result in a weight gain or loss, depression, chronic colds or fatigue, tardiness to family, work, or social related engagements. Taking on the role of caregiver is not an easy one. Adjustments, time, and understanding are a must.

Despite the number of changes and adjustments, the benefits can be numerous to the caregiver. Caregivers cite the following benefits they reap from caregiving:

- Enhanced sense of self-worth.
- Improved relations with the care recipient.
- Assistance from the care recipient.
- Reassurance that the care receiver is getting optimal care.

- Satisfaction of living in accordance with one's religious and/or ethical beliefs or principles.
- Sense of purpose and meaning.
- Feeling that one has coped successfully with a potentially difficult life situation.
- Satisfaction of repaying the care recipient for what they've done for you in the past.
- Enjoyment of spending time together.
- Feeling closer to the recipient as a result of helping.
- Increased patience and endurance.
- More enrichment and enjoyment out of life.

In order to achieve a balance, make a list of the tasks that are involved in caring for the person. Ask yourself which of those tasks you can complete. Which ones can be completed by other family members or friends? Are there needs that can be met by utilizing services in the community? What resources are available to you?

Enlist the support of your family and friends: most are willing to help. Don't reject their offers of assistance because you think the caregiving responsibility is your concern. Equally as important, don't be afraid to ask for help. There are willing hearts and hands ready to assist you in this role—let them.

To answer the questions pertaining to resources, call your community cham-

ber of commerce or other social service agency to receive a booklet of available resources in the community. Check the yellow pages for a listing of specific senior services. The stress related to the caregiving role depends on many things:

- The care recipient's level of physical, cognitive, and social impairment.
- The quality of the relationship between the caregiver and the receiver.
- The caregiver's gender and marital status.
- The types of care being given.
- The lack of satisfactory assistance given by family and friends with caregiving.
- The extent to which the caregiver's personal and social life are disrupted by the demands of caregiving.

Don't let the potential for stress take over. Share responsibilities. Share family problems with friends, and/or professionals. They can be a great resource. Asking relatives, friends, or professionals for help is not a sign of weakness, but one of courage—courage to do what is best for your family. Put yourself in their shoes. If they were in your situation, would you want to offer your assistance wherever it was needed?

One of the most difficult decisions a caregiver may have to make is "Can I provide quality care for my loved one or does he or she need a trained staff and a better equipped facility?" When making the decision keep in mind that it is a very

emotional time for all involved. It may be helpful to bring in a third party—someone who remains neutral and looks at it from outside the situation, giving a different perspective.

Caregiving is a very demanding role that takes much time and dedication. Remember if you decide to take on the role, take time out for yourself. You are important.

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Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Keith L. Smith, Director, Ohio State University Extension.

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3/97—klw