



Care for the Caregiver

Those people who have accepted the role of caregiver spend anywhere from 6 to 13 hours a week or more, taking care of a loved one. Each and every caregiving role is different—no two care recipients require the same care. There may be similarities in physical, mental, and emotional needs, but each person is unique. One thing that caregivers have agreed upon is that there is gratification in meeting the needs of a vulnerable loved one. There is also the “piece-of-mind” in knowing that by being a caregiver you are doing all that you can for the person, perhaps even being able to capture the closeness and tenderness that may not have been there when you needed it earlier in life.

Although it may sound simple and very rewarding, caregiving can definitely put a strain on you and your family. In order to continue caring for yourself, keep your piece-of-mind, the positives highlighted, and take care of yourself. Some ideas to help a caregiver keep the situation in perspective are:

- Think carefully before taking action. Never react to negative attitudes with physical force.

- Take a walk to cool down.
- Take a hot bubble bath to help soothe tensions.
- Listen to soft, familiar music to relax.
- Exercise or do some form of physical activity.
- Meditate to control emotions by deliberately slowing down movements, controlling breathing, and thinking of beautiful things.
- Ask for hugs and kisses.
- Talk to someone who can be objective and help you put the situation into perspective.
- Participate in a support group or some other activity outside of the home.
- Involve other family members, if possible, in the caregiving role. Delegate some of the responsibilities.

As a concerned friend or family member of the caregiver, some things you might offer to do to help ease the stress and strain are:

- Ask how the *caregiver* is doing? How are they coping? Be sincere in your efforts and be willing to listen to their response.
- Be understanding and compassionate. Don't try to give advice or fix their lives. You are a friend.
- Get to know them better. Share their feelings. Be genuine.
- Give the caregiver opportunities for leisure time. Stay and watch the care recipient while others go to dinner or a movie.
- Help the caregiver get away from their everyday responsibilities.
- Provide opportunities for play. Call up the caregiver and invite them to go for a walk.
- Help keep humor in the lives of the caregiver and receiver.

Many caregivers find themselves longing for companionship with others who are going through the same situation. Support groups can be very beneficial to many people. It is a way to receive emotional and social support from others. It is also a way to improve general wellness and personal strength.

Relieve personal stress and strain by seeking help from family, friends, or a support group. This will benefit both the

caregiver and the older dependent family member in the future.

Asking for support or help doesn't imply weakness. Sometimes a gentle reminder is needed so others remember that the caregiver is only human and needs a break. Trying to juggle caregiving, work, and family is a large amount of responsibility. Allow others to help.

If you have a friend or family member who is currently in the role of caregiving, take this opportunity to give them a break from the stress and strains often found when providing care.

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