

The Family Friend

A collection of articles and quotes to aid your family in daily living.

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Caregivers' Guide

Some caregivers say "I've become the classic burn-out and isolated caregiver." Others may say "I'm depressed, can't sleep, have panic attacks, and I've had to put my career on hold." These statements are the norm for caregivers. Unfortunately, caregivers suffer from a disproportionate number of health & emotional problems.

If you are a caregiver, you may feel helpless & worn out. But a few routine changes can help you be a more effective caregiver while keeping yourself healthier. Here are 6 helpful suggestions.

Attend a Caregivers' Support Group. Published reviews have reported that participation in sharing groups helps one feel less burdened & depressed and generally have improved overall feeling of well-being. You may feel you should be able to handle caregiving on your own, but in reality it is a recipe for isolation and fatigue. Sharing with others about your situation

can make you feel less alone and give you some good ideas that you were unaware of. Even Jesus took advantage of a quiet time with his like-minded apostles (Jn. 6:3; Mt. 17:1).

Evaluate your interpersonal role. Caregiving changes the way you relate to the person you're caring for. A parent-child relationship sometimes is reversed. But eldercare experts have suggested that you retain some of the old patterns in your relationship. Try not to view yourself as "parenting," no matter how much it may feel that way. Your parent is first and foremost your parent, regardless of their physical or mental state (B. Carpenter, PhD). Dr. Carpenter states "You cannot reverse that role, and being aware of that will help your loved-one preserve their dignity, as well as your relationship."

Try meditation. Those that have used meditation, yoga, and therapy sessions that help you to observe and accept your physical & mental state, have experienced less depression, sleep better, and feel improved overall quality of life. Jesus often got away by himself to meditate and pray (Mt. 14:22-23; Jn. 6:15)

Exercise. Exercise is not a cure-all, but it can help. It can help with lack of energy, stress, sleeplessness, pain, and depression. "Research shows that if you stay healthy, your loved one is more likely to as well," (K. Robinson, PhD). As little as 15-20 minutes most days will make a difference for you. If your loved one is still mobile, consider a gym membership where both of you can participate. Or consider an in-home exercise routine. A set of hand weights or resistance bands can help with your strength which is helpful if your love-one is immobile or bedridden which is more demanding on your muscles & joints.

Use others' help. Ask for—and accept—the assistance others can provide. Why do you continue to do everything by yourself? Common sense tells you that delegation is a must. Are you still paralyzed by that little voice in your head that says "You are responsible and you should be able to handle it"? Maybe you've promised God that you would always take care of the loved one. Or nobody can care for your loved one as well as you can. My advice is

to say “YES” when someone offers to help. Maybe someone offers to go grocery shopping for you. Sure, they might not get every brand or size just right, but their help can be vital. If a meal is offered say “YES” and take a little break from that task. Sit down and come up with a list of tasks you could unload on someone else. Then see who would be willing to do these things on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis. If offers to help are not forthcoming enough, ask church folks, face to face, to help or email them with your list of tasks that would help you. Jesus taught about the rewards of helping others (Mt. 25:35-40). Check out sharethecare.org and download free resources for organizing a caregiving group. Getting help does NOT mean you are failing at caregiving, it is a way to improve your caregiving.

Consider in-home agencies. Using a company like Home-Instead or Visiting Angels (there are others) can lighten your load and provide expert care and provide helpful hints to you. My family used Home-Instead a couple of hours per day to bath, dress and put mother in the wheelchair every day. Wow, that was a burden lifted. Above all else, don’t forget to pray. It was recently said to me “Without prayer and God’s help I don’t see how anyone could be a successful caregiver”.

CAREGIVERS GUIDE (Part 2)

Caregiving can be a rewarding experience. It certainly can be a loving way to address the

Biblical imperative to honor your father and mother (Ex. 20:12).

Different situations pose different challenges. Here are 3 scenarios.

If you care for someone living with you. Advice #1: Take a Break! Most caregivers end up to be overworked, but the 24/7 routine of being a live-in caregiver can put you at a particularly high risk for burnout. If your friends or family cannot commit to giving you time off every week, consider other community resources like adult day care, Respite care, etc. Experienced personal-care assistants (typically not medical professionals) can be an excellent alternative. Rates run somewhere around \$12 to \$25 per hour. If money is tight, ask local colleges that offer degrees in eldercare and nursing about interns. Utopia would be to be able to take a one-week vacation every 6 months while another family member took your place. Unfortunately this is often not a viable solution. Therefore you need to still do something that makes you feel good every single day, even if it’s only for 15-20 minutes. Bringing old routines (e.g. playing the piano, gardening, solving Sudoku puzzles) and familiar pleasures (e.g. chocolate, coffee break, long hot baths) to your new life can serve as a daily reprieve.

If you care for someone who lives nearby. Not living with the person you are caring for presents its own set of problems and chaos. It is easy to get caught in a trap, feeling like you have to run over for every little

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thing. To avoid commuting and errand-induced fatigue decide which days of the week you will visit. Then, barring emergencies, stick to that schedule, so both you and your loved one have clear expectations. Don’t overlook asking others to handle errands such as delivering food, short visits, grocery shopping etc.

If you care for someone who lives far away. This one can be very tricky. But remember that the person in charge is not you. You obviously don’t have control over day-to-day issues (Medication compliance, reliability of home-health aides, delivery of needed supplies, etc.) So, accept that fact and defer to a primary caregiver. Because of the distance you will want to come to an agreement on who will be the primary caregiver. You can offer input and support, but when it comes to final decisions, defer to the designated primary caregiver.

About 24 million American women provide care for another person. Caregiving is not a small or insignificant issue. Seniors are multiplying rapidly and can easily double in the next 10-15 years. So, even if you are not a caregiver right now, you may very well be in the near future. I hope this information has been of some value to you.

Jack D. Cronk