



The Caregiver Link

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QUOTES

“By loving you more, you love the person you are caring for more.”

~ Peggi Speers

“Never believe that a few caring people can’t change the world.

For indeed, that’s all who ever have.”

~ Margaret Mead

“Being deeply loved by someone gives you strength, while loving someone deeply gives you courage.”

~Laozi

“Caregiving often calls us to lean into love we didn’t know possible.”

~Tia Walker

Forgiveness: The Magic of Letting Go

“Forgiveness is for yourself because it frees you. It lets you out of that prison you put yourself in.” Louise L. Hay

Forgiveness is perhaps the most difficult topic we could have tackled, particularly in this season of love. Most of us have had hurt and betrayal in our lives and these events were all the more painful if delivered by someone we loved. For caregivers, this issue is all the more distressing if the culprit was the patient we are caring for or the friends and relatives we thought would be there in our time of need. What’s more, we are reminded of the circumstances of the betrayal almost daily. It feels safer to hold on to the anger like a shield against further hurt.

One of the difficulties of discussing the concept of forgiveness is there are so many definitions of it out there. Principally religious sources can have more intricate definitions than what we are talking about here. Our definition of forgiveness is simply letting go. We let go of the intense feelings of anger and pain the betrayal caused. We also let go of the urge to exact revenge on the cause of our pain (although, if the person committed a crime, we need not protect them from legal consequences).

Letting go is a healthy thing to do. Researchers have found that forgivers often live longer. Their grudge holding counterparts suffer more often from cardiovascular problems and a weakened immune system. In addition, grievors tend to be less depressed and anxious.

Forgiveness does not mean you have forgotten what has occurred. For example, you have discovered your brother has skimmed some money from your mother’s account when he paid her bills.

Forgiveness does not obligate you to allow him to continue to pay the bills. But forgiveness may allow you to lovingly talk to him about his financial situation and try to work out repayment and a solution as a family.

Forgiveness does not mean you must love the person who wronged you. Therese was bothered by the fact she was unable to feel any love for her mother, although she cared for her and treated her with kindness. During her childhood, Therese’s mother would leave for days at a time with her latest boyfriend and would beat her children at the drop of a hat. She always seemed angry and never said “I love you” to any of them. When Therese learned you needn’t love someone who has no love to return, she was freed of her feelings of guilt and anger, giving her room to experience compassion for a life (her mother’s) poorly lived.

This leads to our next point. Therese’s mom never asked for forgiveness. In fact, it completely escaped her that she had ever done anything wrong! Needing an apology would have kept her in her mother’s power indefinitely.

Forgiveness does not mean the pain of betrayal has magically disappeared. Some hurts leave deep wounds. Those wounds stay raw when we hold on to them, mentally reviewing the offenses over and over. When we let go, we give ourselves the opportunity to experience more fully the love of grandchildren, the wonder of brave little crocuses peeking through the snow or the fragrant tang of Florida





Ask the Caregiver:

Q: Does the V.A. have a pension for disabled, low-income veterans?

A. A low-income veteran may be eligible for a pension from the V.A. if the veteran meets all four of following conditions:

- ◆ Discharged under conditions other than dishonorable.
- ◆ Served at least 90 days of active military service, at least one day of which was during a period of war; those who entered active duty after September 7, 1980, generally must have served at least 24 months, or the full period for which the veteran was called to active duty
- ◆ Has "countable" family income below a yearly limit set by law
- ◆ Is 65 or older, or permanently and totally disabled (the disability need not be connected to the veteran's military service)

Countable income: To qualify for a pension, a veteran must have low income. In deciding eligibility, the V.A. looks at what it calls "countable income." First, the V.A. totals up any income received by the veteran and his or her dependents, including earnings, disability and retirement payments, interest and dividends, and net income from other work or business interests. Then the V.A. reduces that amount by subtracting public assistance benefits such as Supplemental Security Income, food stamps, or county general assistance. The remainder is considered countable income.

Also, if a veteran has unreimbursed medical expenses after applying for a pension, the V.A. may subtract those amounts from countable income for eligibility purposes.

(Unreimbursed expenses are amounts paid for medical care for which the veteran is not reimbursed by Medicare or other any other medical insurance.)

No excessive assets: There is no set limit on the assets -- bank accounts, stocks, bonds, other investments, and property other than the veteran's residence -- a veteran may have and still qualify for a pension. Instead, the rule is that the veteran's net worth cannot be "excessive."

Whether a veteran's net worth is excessive is judged individually, but it basically means an amount sufficient for the veteran to live off for a substantial period of time. The value of a home the veteran lives in is not considered in this assessment of the veteran's assets.

Pension amount: The amount of a veteran's pension is calculated by deducting countable income from the basic annual pension limit, which varies depending on the number

of dependents. To see examples of how a pension amount is calculated, go to the V.A. website's Veterans Pension Calculation page <http://www.benefits.va.gov/pension/index.asp>

Additional Aid & Attendance or Housebound benefits may be available to those veterans who qualify for a pension and who are no longer able to care for themselves, or who are housebound due to a disability.

Low-income pension and service-connected disability pension: A veteran cannot receive both a low-income pension and service-connected disability compensation. For veterans who are eligible for both of these pensions, the V.A. will pay the higher amount.

Applying for low-income veteran's pension: There are several ways to get information about, and to apply for, a veteran's pension. A veteran can apply online through the V.A.'s website. Or a veteran can contact a Veterans Service Officer (VSO) from a recognized veterans service organization. To locate a VSO, call (800) 827-1000. Information is also available on the V.A. website page Veterans Pension Program <http://www.benefits.va.gov/benefits/>

Are you caring for someone with a chronic condition and need to talk? Join a Caregiver Support Group in your area.

Muskegon County:

Tanglewood Park 560 Seminole, Muskegon.

1:00 - 1:30 p.m. Weekly topic, presented by experts, based on the book Quick Tips for Caregivers (books will be available for loan or for purchase)

1:30 - 2:30 p.m. Support Group Open Discussion

Respite Care Available. Please call 231-739-5858 if you have questions or require respite care.

Ottawa County:

The Little Red House 311 E. Exchange, Spring Lake.

Every Thursday at 10:00 with Respite Care Available

For more information call Jim Powers at 616-402-8042.



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oranges. Forgiveness shatters the emotional fencing that limits our lives to anger and bitterness.

Naturally, forgiveness does not mean you need to put a target on your forehead, allowing the offender to continue to injure you. For example, Lori's father verbally abused her, calling her ugly names each time his lunch did not please him or she refused to give him the cigarettes his doctor had banned. It was difficult, but Lori learned to leave the room each time he started, saying, "I will come back when you decide to treat me with respect." These words became a mantra until he accepted he would not get the attention he wanted while behaving this way.

Forgiveness is a process. Those who try to forgive right away are often thwarted. For example, the news carries stories of loving people who immediately forgive the monster who killed their child, then are distressed by the anger and bitterness that erupts after some time has passed. Offenses, particularly serious ones, must be grieved before they can be forgiven. We need to allow ourselves to experience the strong feelings such events generate or they will go underground, causing immense physical and emotional damage. Grief takes time and must not be rushed. Blessedly, the freedom of forgiveness will follow.

This is not to say forgiveness (letting go) is an easy task. But there are ways we can help ourselves to a place of peace.

1. Grieve first. The difficulty of this is measured in how seriously you view the hurt. For example, Lisa is taking care of her grandfather while he is a hospice patient. Her husband is helpful but Grandpa's son and daughter (Lisa's mother) have a basketful of excuses for not helping. This is turning Lisa's life upside down. If she views her mother and uncle as slugs who don't care how much she suffers, this hurt will last awhile. But if Lisa believes her mother would help more if she could, letting go will be easier.
2. Write in a journal or compose a letter to the offender. Since you don't plan to show this to others, you can be brutally frank, pouring your anger out on the page without doing harm to yourself or someone else. (Don't forget to destroy these documents when the storm is over.)

3. Sit in a chair and pretend you are the other person explaining their actions. Lisa did this pretending she was the uncle. She used her uncle's "excuses" as the basis of the explanation. "I'm terrified of my dad. When I was a kid, he would whack me every time I did something wrong or even made a mistake on my homework. I'd be a nervous wreck if I tried to take care of him now." With the words coming out of her own mouth, Lisa began to understand her uncle better and feel compassion for him.
4. Try out a forgiveness ritual. Daniel is gay. His father was a homophobe all his life, a fact which led Daniel to escape to California. When his father was terminally ill, Daniel had to come home to care for him. He knew this would be difficult so he wrote a letter to his father explaining how much Dad had hurt him. Then he took it to Lake Michigan on a windy day and tore the letter into tiny shreds. As he cast them away in the wind, he repeated several times, "I cast this anger and hurt into the winds." Miraculously, Daniel's father apologized as he received the tender care of his son.
5. Some wounds are deep and need special help. Fran was sexually abused by her father, who would never admit what he'd done. At the end of his life, she was called upon to give him care. This should never have happened since she experienced horrendous flashbacks each time she had to provide personal care. Sometimes, the crimes against caregivers can be so deep, they are more than justified in refusing to be caregivers.

Forgiveness is a gift to ourselves and we deserve it. It gives us the freedom to enjoy the best things in life without a cloud of pain and anger over our heads. May you experience the peace of letting go!

"When you forgive, you in no way change the past ~ but you sure do change the future." Bernard Meltzer

By Andrea Heeres



The Mission Of Senior Resources

An Area Agency on Aging

To provide a comprehensive and
coordinated system
of services designed
to promote the
independence and dignity of
older persons and their
families in Muskegon, Oceana,
and Ottawa counties —
a mission compelling us to
target older persons in greatest
need but to advocate for all.

To contact us, please call

Amy or Mary at:

231-739-5858 or 800-442-0054

February's website: <http://www.benefits.va.gov/benefits/>

Ottawa County Caregiver Support Groups Continue

Evergreen Commons:

February – Topic: Communication

Tuesdays, February 14th & 28th, 12:30 p.m.

The Day Center of Evergreen

Thursday, February 9th 1:00 - Fair Haven Church in Hudsonville

Tuesday, February 28th 3:00 - Fellowship Reformed Church

March – Topic: Legal Issues

Tuesdays, March 14th & 28th, 12:30 p.m.

The Day Center of Evergreen

Thursday, March 9th 1:00 Fair - Haven Church in Hudsonville

Tuesday, March 28th 3:00 - Fellowship Reformed Church

Contact Gloria VanHaitsma, Caregiver Coordinator at 616-355-5153 to
register for classes or for any questions regarding support groups/
classes. Classes and support groups are free of charge.
Respite available at all sessions.



***"Can't We Talk About
Something More
Pleasant?"***

By Roz Chast,
Cartoonist, The New Yorker

Synopsis: "The themes are universal:
adult children accepting a parental role;
aging and unstable parents leaving a
family home for an institution; dealing
with uncomfortable physical intimacies;
managing logistics; and hiring strangers
to provide the most personal care."
(Source: Amazon)

