



# The Caregiver Link

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## QUOTES

"I am going to try to pay attention to the spring. I am going to look around at all the flowers, and look up at the hectic trees. I am going to close my eyes and listen."

~ Anne Lamot

"No winter lasts forever; no spring skips its turn."

~ Hal Borland

"Never cut a tree down in the wintertime. Never make a negative decision in the low time. Never make your most important decisions when you are in your worst moods. Wait. Be patient. The storm will pass. The spring will come."

~ Robert H. Schuller

## Emotional Side of Caregiving—Part II

As we talked about last month, whether you become a caregiver gradually or suddenly due to a crisis, or whether you are a caregiver willingly or by default, many emotions surface when you take on the job of caregiving. Some of these feelings happen right away and some don't surface until you have been caregiving for a while. Whatever your situation, it is important to remember that you, too, are important. All of your emotions, good and bad, about caregiving are not only allowed, but valid and important.

Many feelings come up when you are caring for someone day in and day out. Many caregivers set out saying, "This won't happen to me. I love my mother, father, husband, wife, sister, brother, friend, etc." But after a while, the "negative" emotions that we tend to want to bury or pretend we aren't feeling come up. Caregivers are often reluctant to express these negative feelings for fear they will be judged by others (or judge themselves) or don't want to burden others with their problems.

Not paying attention to your feelings can lead to poor sleep, illness, trouble coping, stress eating, substance abuse, etc. When you admit to your feelings, you can then find productive ways to express them and deal with them, so that you and the care receiver can cope better in the future.

This article will identify some of the common, often hard to admit, feelings that caregivers experience. Once identified, suggestions for how you might better cope with these feelings are offered.

### *If only we were perfect we would not feel . . .*

#### **Guilt**

Guilt is the feeling we have when we do something wrong. Guilt in caring for care receivers comes in many forms. There is guilt over not having done enough to have prevented them from getting sick in the first place. There is guilt over feeling like you want this to end.

Or guilt over having been impatient with your care receiver too much. There is guilt over not loving or even liking the care receiver at times. There is guilt over not doing enough for the care receiver or not doing a good enough job as a caregiver. And if the care receiver falls or something else happens, there is guilt about it being your fault that it happened. And sometimes caregivers feel guilty about thinking of their own needs and see themselves as selfish, especially if they should do something like go to a movie or out to lunch with a friend.

**Coping:** You need permission to forgive yourself. You can't be perfect 24/7. It's impossible to be in perfect control of how you feel at all times. We all carry around a lot of "shoulds," such as "No one will do as good of a job as I do, so I have to be here all the time." Or "If I leave and something happens, I will never forgive myself." Consider changing guilt into regret, "I'm in a difficult situation and I have to make difficult decisions sometimes." "I regret that I am human and get impatient sometimes." "I am doing the best I can even though things go wrong from time to time and I regret that I am not perfect."

#### **Impatience**

How difficult is it to get your care receiver up in the morning? How about up, dressed, given breakfast and to their doctor's appointment all before 10am? And you have other things to accomplish that day. All this and the care receiver is acting unhelpful and moving slowly. Perhaps the care receiver refuses to use his walker even though he has fallen many times and the doctor and physical therapist emphasized he always needs to use it. It is understandable that you would get impatient at times.

**Coping:** Forgive yourself. When tired, frustrated and trying to keep things under control, it's natural to want to speed up and have compliance from the care receiver to keep them safe and healthy.



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## Ask the Caregiver:

**Q:** How can I take time off work to care for my family member/friend?

**A:** Some companies have programs to connect you with community services, counseling, respite care, legal and financial assistance, and caregiver support groups. Others have begun offering leave for caregiving and flexible work arrangements.

Learn about company policies. Talk to your human resources department, or read your employee handbook to find out about any benefits your company may offer, such as an employee assistance program.

Know your rights. Under the Family and Medical Leave Act, eligible workers are entitled to 12 weeks per year of unpaid leave for family caregiving, without the loss of job security or health benefits.

Talk to your manager. Be upfront about your role as a caregiver, and spell out the concrete changes to your schedule you'd like to accommodate your responsibilities.

Inquire about flextime. Even if no formal policies exist, ask if you can work from home a day or two a week or inquire about a job-sharing or part-time arrangement.

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## Five Minute Stress Relief Ideas

- ☐ Do a lap or two around your house
- ☐ Stand up and stretch
- ☐ Look at a picture from a recent (fun) event
- ☐ Read something that takes your mind off the issue
- ☐ Listen to music that calms you
- ☐ Close your eyes and clear your mind
- ☐ Get some fresh air
- ☐ Laugh or make someone else laugh
- ☐ Breathe deeply

## Memorial Day Celebrations for Seniors and Caregivers

What do you have planned for this Memorial Day weekend? Many will spend time with family and friends, plan picnics, outings, or simply relax. As a nation, we are called to reflect on the true meaning of this national holiday, which is to honor and recognize America's military personnel who died serving our Country.

As a caregiver, you'll want to plan an event to include your aging loved one.

Here are some tips on how you can observe Memorial Day with your loved ones:

- Visit cemeteries and place flags or flowers on the graves of our fallen heroes.
- Visit memorials.
- Fly the US Flag at half-staff until noon.
- Fly the 'POW/MIA Flag' as well (Section 1082 of the 1998 Defense Authorization Act).
- Participate in a "National Moment of Remembrance" at 3 p.m. to pause and think upon the true meaning of the day, and for Taps to be played.
- Renew a pledge to aid the widows, widowers, orphans of our fallen dead, and to aid the disabled veterans.
- Watch local parades.
- Have a red, white and blue themed picnic.

When planning your Memorial Day activities, remember to consider the heat and sun.

- Dress in light-colored, lightweight, clothing that is loose-fitting for air circulation.
- Have your person wear a hat or use an umbrella when outside, even if they are not in the direct sun. Use sunscreen with an SPF of 15 or greater anytime you and your loved one go outside.
- Drink water before outdoor activities and drink water at regular intervals during the day. Avoid beverages with caffeine or alcoholic beverages that can aid dehydration. Encourage your person to drink water frequently; every 15-20 minutes.
- Try to schedule outdoor activities for cooler times of the day- before 10 a.m. and after 6 p.m.
- During outdoor activity, take rest breaks frequently. If your person has clear, pale urine, they are probably drinking enough fluids.
- If your person has a chronic medical problem, talk with their doctor about additional precautions they should take to prevent heat related illness. Some conditions and medications may place seniors at higher risk.



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So, first, slow down. Leave a lot of time to accomplish tasks. Leave a LOT of time. Control the environment as much as you can, but know you can't always prevent your father from taking off without his walker. Create a list of the things you are in control of and are not. Understand what you can and cannot control.

## **Jealousy**

Do you sometimes feel jealous of your friends who are able to go out and do things that you can no longer do, because of your caregiving responsibilities? Are you jealous of your siblings who are not doing their share to help? Do you feel jealous of a friend whose parent died quickly and easily while you take care of a parent who has had dementia for many years? Are we jealous of someone who got a big inheritance since we are struggling to pay bills and to be a good caregiver? We often don't admit to this feeling, because we have always been told not to be jealous. But that doesn't mean that we don't, in fact, feel jealous from time to time, of those who have it easier or better than us.

**Coping:** It's okay to admit to being jealous. Because things are not fair, we often have flashes of resentment and envy at other people's good fortune compared to our own. Jealousy is a problem when we wallow in it and prevent ourselves from enjoying the things we DO have. Focus on what you do have, whatever they may be and find a place in your heart for gratitude.

## **Lack of Appreciation**

Most of us do not want to be dependent on someone else. Learning to accept help is hard. So, the care receiver is often pushing away our attempts to be helpful and caring. If someone has dementia, this problem is often much worse. And we get our feelings hurt because the care receiver does not thank us or even see how much we are giving up in order to care for them.

**Coping:** Sometimes we must give ourselves our own pat on the back. Writing in a journal about the things you do each day might help you to appreciate how much you give and how much you do. Having a support group or a group of friends/family to cheer you on is important, and both comforting and necessary to remain resilient through your caregiving journey.

## **Loneliness**

The longer you are a caregiver, the more isolated you become. With no one to talk to day in and day out except the care receiver, it is easy to lose a sense of yourself. Friends stop calling since we are no longer available and we hesitate to call them because we know "they don't want to hear about it any more" or "I have nothing to talk about because my life is all about caregiving."

**Coping:** Find ways to get out of the house and involved in something other than caregiving. Learn about resources from your local Area Agency on Aging about respite programs or day care programs that will allow you to get a much needed and well deserved break. No one can do this job alone. Look at your wider circle of support—faith community, neighbors, friends, distant relatives, etc. to see where you might get some nurturing for you.

## **Loss**

Caregivers experience many losses, some of which have already

been mentioned: loss of control, loss of independence, loss of income, loss of your best friend, loss of the future, loss of a sense of yourself. Loss leads to grief and depression.

**Coping:** Identifying your losses can help you to cope with them. For each of us, the losses will be different. When you know what you are feeling, you will be able to look at the loss and think about what might work for you to help you deal with it.

## **Resentment**

When put in a situation not of our choosing, it's not uncommon to feel negative and resentful. Perhaps, you have siblings who are not helping provide care or maybe you are an only child, became the caregiver by default, and feel you have very little desire or support to offer care. Little things easily become big things when we feel unappreciated and unacknowledged. And feeling like you have to do it all, and do it all by yourself, is a guaranteed way to feel resentment.

**Coping:** Family situations and dynamics can be a real challenge. Having help from family may make your situation easier, but sometimes family tensions make it even harder to get help. The more support you accept, the easier it will be to let go of feeling burdened and resentful of those who are not doing their share. If you can't get help from the people you think should be offering it, then you need to broaden your circle of people to include those who can and will help. It is easy to forget about the good things that have happened or are happening when we only focus on the negative.

## **Tiredness**

As a caregiver, how often do you get the full eight hours of sleep they always say you need? Sleep is often postponed while you grab a few minutes of alone time after the care receiver goes to bed. Sleep is often disturbed because the care receiver gets up at night and needs help going to the bathroom or being re-directed back to bed. Sleep is often disturbed because you can't fall asleep or stay asleep because you are worrying about all the stressors that come with being a caregiver.

**Coping:** Sleep must be put on the priority list. Lack of sleep leads to obesity, illness, crankiness, impatience, inefficiency in accomplishing tasks, and a state of mental foggiess among other issues. If you are having trouble falling asleep or staying asleep not related to direct caregiving, talk to your physician. If you are having trouble sleeping due to caregiving problems, talk to the care receiver's physician. There are ways to help both of you to get the rest you need. As a caregiver, you do amazing work caring for others in need. But as a caregiver, you also need to think about yourself. Just pushing through each day will eventually wear you out and cause you to burn out. Emotional issues can weigh you down and impact not only your ability to cope and provide care, but they can also harm your health and well being. It is important to learn to ask for help and prioritize getting breaks from caregiving, so that you can be the caregiver you want to be.

**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**

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**231-739-5858 or 800-442-0054**

May's website: <https://oam.acl.gov/>

Would you like to be a “Green Caregiver”?

If you would like to start receiving your Caregiver Link by email, simply email [amy@srwmi.org](mailto:amy@srwmi.org) with the words Caregiver Link in the subject line. Email newsletters give you access to direct website links as well as help us be environmentally friendly!



**Readers Corner:**

*When Someone You Love Has a  
Mental Illness* By: Rebecca Woolis

An essential resource--featuring 50  
proven Quick  
Reference guides--for  
the millions of parents,  
siblings, and friends of  
people with mental  
illness, as well as  
professionals in the  
field.

