Tips for Caregivers

The caregiver tips and suggestions listed below do not come from just one source. They are pearls of wisdom and practical suggestions that have evolved from the collective experience of family and professional caregivers over time.

- Give yourself unceasing credit for what you are contributing to the life of the individual for whom you are providing care. Whether or not you are a caregiver out of love or obligation, you are undoubtedly adding a dimension of quality and dignity to the person’s existence that might not otherwise occur.
- Keep track of your own physical and medical wellbeing.
- Avoid using drugs and/or alcohol as a remedy, or as replenishment for fatigue.
- Avoid unrealistic expectations of yourself, the person for whom you are caring, and others who assist with care. Have the courage to be imperfect.
- Whenever possible, get a minimum of six hours sleep a night.
- Take some time each day, if possible, to write down your thoughts and feelings about caregiving in a journal. List problems and successes as well as the short-term and long-term goals. Keep them realistic.
- Develop and maintain regular, planned events that are pleasurable and relaxing. Give you an opportunity for self-renewal.
- Never feel guilty about taking time for yourself, and enjoying yourself, even if your loved one is unable to do so.
- Be prepared to reach compromises with your time and effort as well as that of the person for whom you caring.
- Spend quality time with your loved one or the person receiving care.
- Learn one or two quick and simple relaxation and self-affirmation exercises, and practice them daily. Making this commitment to yourself will benefit your care recipient, too. Maybe you can practice a relaxation exercise together.
- Plan ahead by making sure that all financial and legal documents are in place including an estate plan/will and testament or trust, advance directives (living will and medical power of attorney), durable power of attorney and insurance plans.
• Learn to accept help and to respect the fact that others may provide assistance in ways that are different than yours. They may also demonstrate care and concern differently.

• If you hire home care workers or respite workers, supervise them enough so that they are accountable without micro-managing them. Treat them as part of the “team” that is giving care – trust encourages people to do a better job.

• Ask for other family members, friends and professionals to help you. Remember, you, your loved one and the people who assist with caregiving are part of the same team. Be specific and direct in explaining what you want them to do, or what you need.

• Seek out and cultivate at least one professional (mental health professional or minister) who understands the impact of your caregiving experience. Maintain regular contact with this person, and evaluate both your challenges and your successes.

• Participate in a caregiver support group. You will discover that you are not alone in this experience, and you will gain invaluable suggestions and ideas from other caregivers.

• Allow yourself to find the humor in caregiving, and seek ongoing contact with friends and others who are upbeat, and who will listen to you when you need a boost.

• If your loved one is mentally and emotionally capable, take a risk by sharing some of your thoughts and feelings about what is happening in an honest, but respectful way. Come to some agreement about each other’s limitations as well as strengths. Learn to share your fears, and most importantly, learn to share your hopes.

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