



Fact Sheet:

When a Caregiver Feels Guilty

Every person who provides care to a loved one asks, “Am I doing enough? Am I doing a good enough job?”

For caregivers of adults with a degenerative brain impairment, these questions often lead to feelings of guilt. When faced with a deteriorating illness in a loved one, it is difficult to see the extraordinary value of the care that we provide. It is even more difficult to allow ourselves to be less than perfect.

Guilt, therefore, is one of the many feelings that all caregivers experience at one time or another, and guilt can sometimes be an obstacle to getting the help that’s needed.

There is so much work that goes into a routine day of caregiving duties that include constant vigilance, shopping, running errands, planning and preparing meals, bathing, dressing, managing the household and finances. The list, already exhausting, may go on to include dealing with night waking, behavior management or nursing duties. It is usually more than a 24-hour-a-day job. A caregiver manages so many areas, yet it is easy to feel that more could be done.

Caregiving can also be a very frustrating endeavor when we cannot control another person’s behavior, or

when there are no thanks for our devotion, or when we are just plain tired and cannot rest because of another’s immediate needs.

Frustration and anger are a part of every caregiver’s life. When these negative feelings come up, guilt often follows and the guilt is hard to cope with.

We need to remind ourselves that feelings of frustration and anger are normal and acceptable, as is the guilt that follows. We can actually use these feelings as reminders to take a break, and to make a point of seeking some pleasure for ourselves, in order to become renewed and continue our duties as a devoted caregiver.

It is important to recognize that we are doing the best we can. We must allow ourselves to be human and give ourselves some positive strokes for what we are contributing to our loved one’s care. It must be recognized that the brain-impaired person’s needs may increase over time and ***as they do, the caregiver needs to increase the amount of help received.*** It may be difficult to ask for help, but once we begin to reach out, it becomes apparent that many people are willing to provide it.

It is important to ask family and friends for help in specific ways. Once it is

understood what tasks can be done, people usually feel relieved that there is actually something they can do to help. Help that provides the caregiver with time to renew is called **respite**.

The Value of Respite

The caregiver who understands that she/he needs a rest and some personal time will become a more effective caregiver and probably be able to continue for a longer time. When we go without help or a break from constant caregiving duties, we are attempting an impossible mission and will be setting ourselves up for an eventual breakdown.

The earlier the concept of respite is introduced into the caregiving situation, the better.

Respite is especially effective when it is scheduled regularly. The brain-impaired family member may also benefit from respite by having someone different to interact with at home.

Another respite option is for the impaired individual to attend a program outside the home, which may provide a welcome change of environment as well as some social stimulation.

There are many community services that offer respite to caregivers. If you need information about services in your community, or help exploring respite options, or would just like to talk to someone about the emotional aspects of caregiving, call the:

Resources

Southern Caregiver Resource Center
3675 Ruffin Road, Suite 230
San Diego, CA 92123
(858) 268-4432; (800) 827-1008 (in CA)
E-mail: scrc@caregivercenter.org
Web site: www.caregivercenter.org

Southern Caregiver Resource Center offers free support services to caregivers of adults with chronic and disabling conditions in San Diego and Imperial counties. Services include information and referral, needs assessments, care planning, family consultation, case management, individual counseling, legal and financial consultation, respite care, education and training, and support groups.

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