



***I'm feeling overwhelmed and guilty. What should I do? How often do those thoughts pop up in the course of a caregiver's day? People today are feeling tremendous pressure to "do it all," taking care of children and aging parents while maintaining career and home. Instead of having a sense of accomplishment, many people feel guilt when they run out of energy to handle all of the tasks.***

The great myth of our time is that we should be able to "do it all," like previous generations seem to have done. The truth is that some of our parents and grandparents did care for their parents at home; however, the reality is that there was a close extended family available to pitch in and share the care.

Pablo Casals, the world renowned cellist, said, "The capacity to care is the thing that gives life its deepest significance and meaning." Learning your potential for caregiver burnout and developing a plan of action will help you avoid the frustration, depression and despair that come with losing that capacity to care.

There are two main causes for burnout:

The first is the changing of roles that happens between adult children and their aging parents. The dynamics that keep a family together suddenly change, and the line that separates parental and child roles become blurred.

The second cause of caregiver burnout is the expectations the caregiver has for the outcome of the caregiving. Often the rewards are intangible and far off, and the lack of control one feels over the situation is compounded by other factors such as lack of finances, little or no family support, or poor management and planning skills. When the caregiver places

unrealistic goals on the outcome, there is no solid sense of direction. Feelings of isolation become more prevalent as the caregiver sees himself spiraling downward into a pool of frustration and despair.

As a caregiver you must know your limitations and abilities. You should have open communication with the person for whom you are caring and discuss these limitations and abilities. Our parent should never become the child in this relationship. You should treat and care for the parent as an adult, being sure that his or her needs are met.

You can prevent caregiver burnout by taking the following actions:

- Know yourself and take a reality check of your situation. Recognize your potential for caregiver burnout. If you can recall an instance of attitude change because of stress, then you're a candidate for burnout.
- Know how to be a caregiver. The more you know about the illness of the person you are caring for and strategies for caregiving, the more effective you will be.
- Develop new tools for coping. Remember to lighten up and accentuate the positive. Stay healthy. Eat right and get plenty of exercise and rest. Take an occasional break from caregiving, and don't be afraid to ask for help. Take advantage of support groups made up of other caregivers who have experienced what you are experiencing. Their knowledge and experience can provide invaluable support.
- Plan your days by assigning priorities to the tasks at hand. Don't forget to take some time to reward yourself. Have hope and live in the moment. Remember the saying "by the yard it's hard, but by the inch it's a cinch."

Resources you can use to assist you in your search for assistance are your local area Council on Aging, ombudsman program and the Eldercare Locator Service. Your area Council on Aging can give you information on the types and locations of local in-home respite services, home-delivered meal programs, support groups, adult day care opportunities and other services. The Eldercare Locator Service is a free, national service that can link you with local information and referral services throughout the United States. To access this service call 1-800-677-1116. If your employer has an employee assistance program, you may want to find out if they offer an eldercare information and referral service.

#### References:

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