

Challenges of Being A New Caregiver

Caregivers are courageous people who are expected to take on new and challenging responsibilities when the person they care about becomes ill and relies on them for support. Many people do not learn about being a caregiver until they are left with no choice. This change in circumstances can occur suddenly and without warning.

It is important to recognize the value of the role that has been undertaken and the impact this will have on a loved one's care and comfort. Sometimes, acknowledging this can be difficult as much attention is directed towards the person who is ill or in need.

The needs of the person you are caring for take up most of your thoughts.

But, as a new caregiver, you must be made aware of the number one rule of caregiving: You need to look after yourself. Otherwise, the quality of care that you are capable of giving, your relationship with the person you are caring for, and the quality of your own life could suffer greatly.

As a new caregiver, you may be experiencing a wide range of emotions in this time of transition. You may feel depression and resentment over the loss of income, social activities, freedom, privacy, companionship, and loss of your loved one's contributions. You may feel anger and frustration with the illness for forcing you into this new caregiver role and for putting future plans on hold. Your family and friends may have conflicting ideas about what you should be doing and that can also lead to feeling angry and frustrated. You may feel guilt for having these emotions when you are healthy and your loved one is ill. All of these emotions can leave you feeling alone and uncertain about being a caregiver.

You can take pride in many of the things that you have accomplished, especially since you are making an important contribution to your loved one's care. Perhaps you have found a new way to reach out and be sensitive to someone else's needs or you are gaining strength in watching your family pull together. You can take pleasure in knowing you are helping to maintain your loved one's dignity and comfort.

Asking for help is a sign of strength; perhaps you have found out about and asked for help from community resources. Knowing that being prepared can reduce stress; you might have learned more about your loved one's disability or illness. Even in the face of illness, you are encouraging your loved one to be as independent as possible. You may be unable to provide all the care the way you would like, but what you do provide does make a difference.

You are not alone in the emotions you are feeling. There are many others in your community who are also caregiving. It may help if you share your questions and feelings. You are welcome to join other caregivers at monthly get-togethers for information and sharing support.