



HOSPICE INSIGHTS

INSIGHTS 92: TAKING CARE OF THE CAREGIVER

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It seems that professional caregivers are masters at delivering care, but know very little about taking care of themselves. Perhaps that is an unfair statement ~ we **do** little to take care of ourselves. Yet we know if we do not pay attention to our own needs we will probably “burn out”. There is a wonderful quote by Mel Pohl, Kay Deniston, and Doug Toft in **The Caregiver’s Journey** which states, ***“Caregiving means admitting we do not always have the answers or know what to do. It means admitting our fears, taking time for ourselves, and getting help when we need it”***. But often times we do not get help when we need it...

Summer is here and it is a great time to start taking better care of ourselves. Below are some helpful hints:

- **Create a support system** ~ When you care for someone else, you need someone to care for you. This must be someone you trust and can talk with about your feelings and your needs. If there is not a person who fits the bill, find a support group.
- **Clarify your values and priorities** ~ This will enable you to complete the most important things in your life, and guide you in all you do.
- **Clarify your needs** ~ Do something about fulfilling your needs, as well as the needs of the person/s you are caring for. If your needs are ignored for any length of time, it will directly affect the care you are providing!
- **Learn good coping strategies** ~ Coping strategies for stress from your job, home life, bereavement, and everyday problems are necessary. Examples of coping strategies are relaxation techniques, deep relaxation techniques (self-hypnosis), journaling, eating healthy, and exercise.
- **Acknowledge your strengths** ~ Do this on a daily basis, reminding yourself of your added responsibilities (family caregivers), acknowledging your accomplishments, and being present for those you are caring for.

- **Keep your life balanced** ~ Be good to yourself. *“All work and no play...”*
- **Work your way through** ~ Pace yourself by acknowledging your limitations, ask for help, and learn to delegate.
- **Nurture your body** ~ Eat healthy meals, exercise on a regular basis, learn to release tensions, use deep breathing to relax and revitalize yourself, and get plenty of rest.
- **Feed your soul** ~ Learn what renews you emotionally and spiritually; list what you enjoy doing and keep adding to your list; remember the simple things like reading, movies, gardening, friends, and connect spiritually to gain a greater sense of strength, courage, wisdom, compassion, and peace.
- **Allow yourself to grieve** ~ Caregivers often feel despair while caregiving. Many different feelings can fall under grief, such as feeling helpless and/or overwhelmed, questioning spiritual beliefs, anger, guilt, sadness, confusion, rejection, and frustration, to name a few. It is okay to let the tears flow and vent your anger.
- **Take daily vacations** ~ Find the time to have personal time everyday so you can read a favorite book, take a favorite walk, meditate, listen to your favorite music, write in your journal, develop a list of what brings you joy, and dream new dreams.
- **Find meaningful rituals** ~ Rituals provide comfort and peace. They may take the form of religion, prayer, or meditation. Take the time to develop new rituals which feed your soul. Develop a calm, peaceful environment for yourself, in which you can enjoy the rituals you have created to help you cope.
- **DO NOT FORGET YOUR SENSE OF HUMOR!!!** ~ Laughter is the best stress reliever there is. It releases endorphins which are nature’s best anti-depressant and pain reliever; consequently, laughter is very healing.

Perhaps the most important thing to remember is *“we cannot take care of others until we take care of ourselves”*. Develop a great self-care plan and follow it religiously. It is okay to invest in yourself, especially your mental and physical health.

References:

National Family Caregivers Association.
 Vineyard S.; *How to Take Care of You*. Heritage Arts Publishing, 1987.

Mission Statement

Hospice of the Twin Cities' mission is to enhance the quality of the lives of our patients and their families y providing respectful care based on maintaining dignity, alleviating physical, psychosocial, and spiritual suffering, advocating for fundamental rights, and affirming the sacred value of life.