

Caregiving Anger and Frustration

It may be hard to keep your cool when caregiving responsibilities are added to your already busy life. You may feel like the situation that you or your loved ones are in is unfair. Sometimes you might feel angry enough to shout, use hurtful words, and clench your fists.

Angry Emotions are Normal

There are many words to describe the emotions these caregivers might have felt: angry, let down, humiliated, bitter, mad, aggressive, frustrated, annoyed, or critical. Everyone feels this way sometimes. If you feel hurt or attacked, anger can motivate you to fight back. If you feel helpless, anger can help you feel in control. Anger shows you that there is a problem that needs to be solved. When you release your emotions in the form of yelling or shouting, it can also bring a sense of relief.

When is Anger a Problem?

Even if anger helps you feel in control in the moment, if you act on your anger it can cause more harm than good. Anger can impact your relationships with other people and can push people away. Anger can also make it harder to communicate and it may also affect your work.

If you find that your anger is causing problems in your life or with caregiving, here are some steps you can take to keep your cool in difficult situations.

1. Pause and Recognize How You Are Feeling

How do you know when you are feeling angry? Are there warning signs before you start to shout or use hurtful words? Does your heartbeat quicken? Are you warm? What do you feel like? Try to recognize the warning signs before you act on your anger. When you feel yourself start to get angry, pause. Counting to ten before acting or speaking may seem old-fashioned, but it is very wise advice.

2. Use Deep Breathing

Deep breathing is simple and effective! You can use it anywhere and anytime. Deep breathing can help slow down

racing thoughts and emotions. There are many different breathing techniques, but here is one you can try now:

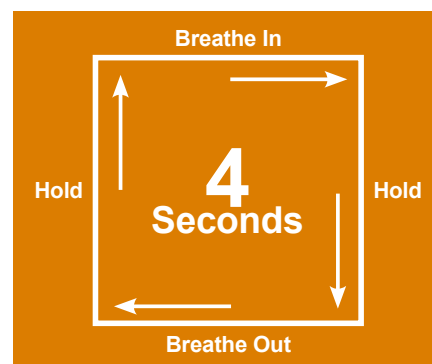
Box Breathing

Imagine a square with 4 sides.

- Breathe in for 4 seconds as your mind travels along one side of the box.
- As your mind moves onto the next side of the box, hold your breath for 4 seconds.
- When you reach the third side of the box, breathe out for 4 seconds.
- On the last side of the box, hold your breath for 4 seconds.
- Repeat as needed.

It is helpful to practice deep breathing when you are calm so that you are comfortable with this skill. This makes it easier to use when you are feeling stressed or angry.

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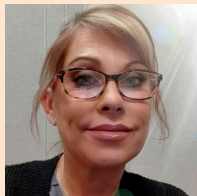
To provide a comprehensive and coordinated system of services designed to promote the independence and dignity of older persons and their families in Muskegon, Oceana, and Ottawa – a mission compelling us to target older persons in greatest need but to advocate for all.

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kport@seniorresourceswmi.org.

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3. Express Your Anger Effectively

You can use assertive communication to express your needs and thoughts, while still showing respect for other people. This means that you can express your anger and still maintain important relationships.

To use assertive communication:

- Use a respectful tone of voice and volume. Even if you find it hard to change what you say, changing how loud or how intensely you say it can make a difference.
- Start by telling the other person how you feel using “I feel” statements. For example, “I feel overwhelmed and frustrated.”
- Describe the other person’s specific behavior that you are referring to. For example, “You have not helped me take Mom to any of her doctor’s appointments”.
- Tell the other person how their behavior impacts you. For example, “I’ve lost hours at work because I can’t manage all of Mom’s needs.”

Assertive communication is a skill that takes practice, just like any other caregiving skill. Be patient with yourself and try it out as often as you can. ❖

Guilt Free Caregiving

by Dr. Beverly Kidder

I read a comment in a publication by Catholic Family Services in Michigan about caregiving: “As a caregiver, you are consumed by guilt, doom, fear, hopelessness and even helplessness.” It stuck with me over the years because I have often felt those emotions. Fortunately, not all of them at the same time. It helps me to realize that all caregivers are struggling with feelings of guilt, no matter how hard we’re trying to be the best caregiver possible.

Why do we experience guilt? There are 5 reasons that come to mind.

1. Promises made in the past come back to haunt us. That promise we made to Dad on his death bed that we’d never put Mom in a home; promises we made to parents that we’d always keep our brother with a disability in our home; promises that we’d never bring a stranger into the house as a caregiver.
2. We are doomed by the thought of “coulda,” “woulda,” “shoulda.” I coulda done more; I shoulda done more; if only I knew, I woulda done more.
3. We are all poor communicators. We try to read the mind of the person for whom we care. We expect them to know what we’re thinking. We make assumptions about meanings. We don’t seek clarification and then, we wonder why the things we do aren’t meeting the needs of the person for whom we care, and why the things they say and do often displease us.
4. Then, we feel guilty for being angry with them. Anger is the primary source of our guilt. Expressing anger toward the care recipient always creates guilt, but the unexpressed anger that we swallow causes even more guilt.
5. Lastly, some of us were raised in a culture where guilt is ingrained. Nothing we do is ever quite good enough. We are never able to rest on our laurels. We know it could have been done better. So, we feel guilty.

There are 24 hours in a day and, in an ideal world we could spend all 24 caring for the person we love. We’d create a warm, loving, supportive, nurturing relationship where we would never feel guilty because everything we do is done perfectly. But in

fact, we live in a less than ideal world. In addition to being a caregiver, most of us are also involved with spouses, parents, children, grandchildren, siblings, and in-laws.

Most caregivers are also employed with jobs that keep us away from the home for 9 hours a day. Most of us have a home that requires daily attention. Someone must do the laundry, shop, prepare the meals, clean the bathroom, feed the dog and all the other tasks that are necessary to keep a home functioning. If you do all these things, daily, you've probably spent 14 hours of the 24 available to each of us. What's left for caregiving? Ten hours, if you give up sleeping. If you also have your own medical appointments, responsibilities outside the home and job, such as church, PTA, politics, family gatherings, you have even less time to be a caregiver. How can you possibly do your best as a caregiver with all these constraints? It's no surprise that you don't feel that you've done enough, or that what you've done is good enough. Hence the guilt.

What can you do to eliminate things from the list of "must dos"? NOTHING!

Everything needs to be done. You're like a batter caught between 2nd and 3rd base. No matter which direction you go you're going to get tagged out. Guilt comes creeping in again. It comes with the territory of caregiving. Accept it, but sometimes the guilt is too much. It's important for caregivers to recognize the signs when caregiving is too much and take action. Unresolved guilt can lead to depression. Know the signs of depression. Watch for headaches, disturbed sleep. Can't fall asleep, perhaps can't sleep through the night, maybe just wanting to sleep all day. Notice if you're easily upset. Either crying with little provocation or angry a lot of the time. Are you having difficulty concentrating on things, remembering things, making decisions? Do you feel overwhelmed? Do you feel hopeless? These are all signs that the guilt is more than you can manage, and you're depressed. What do you do?

Recognize the signs in yourself. Monitor your feelings regularly and act when you see the signs. It's essential for your physical and mental health and for the future care of your loved one.

What actions can you take? First, let go. Simplify your lifestyle. Let go of the notion that meals are cooked perfectly, balanced perfectly with a loving family gathered around a perfectly set dining room table. Sometimes, pizza delivery in a cardboard box gets the job done and saves you hours of time. Learn to lower your standards. You're not perfect and will never be. You can learn to live with "good enough." You'll have more time for caregiving that is loving and nurturing if it doesn't also have to be perfect. If your mother's hair isn't washed every week without fail, and instead you spend that time looking at a family photo album with her, she'll feel happy and you might also get the benefit of sharing a happy moment instead of a chore-filled moment. You are still making memories, try to make some that are happy and not just duty filled.

Ask for help. Caregivers always say there's no one who can help me: everyone is busy, has a job, has family responsibilities. We make excuses for other people without giving them the benefit of making their own choices. Remember, we are poor communicators. We don't actually ask many people for help we just assume that they can't/won't help, and we feel angry that we have no help. Instead, sit down and draw up a list of everyone you can think of who you ever helped. Then create another list of everyone your care recipient ever helped. I guarantee you it's a long list. People who are selected to be caregivers are chosen because they have a history of helping others. People know they can be relied upon. The lists you created are your potential pool of helpers. Next begin to think about all the

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April's Website

www.caregiverslibrary.org

Quotes

Caregiving is a constant learning experience."

Vivian Frazier

"Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have the potential to turn a life around."

Leo Buscaglia

"Compassion brings us to a stop, and for a moment we rise above ourselves."

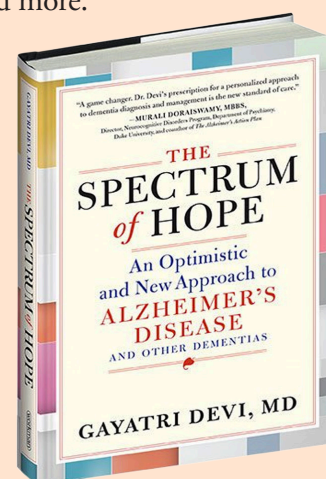
Mason Cooley

This Month's Book

The Spectrum of Hope

by Gayatri Devi, MD

The Spectrum of Hope offers practical advice, wisdom, and real hope. There are chapters on how to maintain independence and dignity; how to fight depression, anxiety, and apathy; how to communicate effectively with a person suffering from dementia, and more.



Forty-Eight Mental Breaks for Caregivers

Caregiving takes a lot of time. Even if you had spare time to daydream in the first place, it's probably gone now. However, you must give yourself a mental break once in a while.

The following list is intended to make you think back to a simpler time in your past, and possibly one in your future. Use them sparingly (one at a time) or be a glutton (overdose on all of them at the same time).

The goal here is to make you feel better. If you really want to make yourself feel better, use this as a "to do" list. Please pass the list on to others who may need it.

- ♦ Falling in love
- ♦ Laughing so hard your face hurts
- ♦ A hot shower
- ♦ No lines at the Super Wal-Mart
- ♦ A special glance
- ♦ Getting mail - other than bills or junk mail
- ♦ Taking a drive on a pretty road
- ♦ Hearing your favorite song on the radio
- ♦ Lying in bed listening to the rain outside
- ♦ Hot towels out of the dryer
- ♦ Finding the sweater you want is on sale for half price
- ♦ Chocolate milkshake (or vanilla!)
- ♦ A long-distance phone call
- ♦ A bubble bath
- ♦ Giggling
- ♦ A good conversation
- ♦ The beach
- ♦ Finding a \$20 bill in your coat from last winter
- ♦ Laughing at yourself
- ♦ Midnight phone calls that last for hours

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Guilt Free Caregiving, continued from page 3

things you do in each day or week. Itemize them, with specifics. Caregivers tend to speak in global terms. "I'm just so busy, there isn't time for anything," but there are no specifics, so no one knows how to help you. Make a detailed list about each and everything and how often it must be done and how long it takes to accomplish. Now you can begin to ask for help.



No one wants to sign up to take over your role as a caregiver, but almost everyone on the list would be willing, if asked, to pick up your mother's medications once a month at the pharmacy. That's one less task for you to do. Almost everyone you, or she, ever helped would be willing to stop over once a month for an hour and visit with your mom so you can have an hour of alone time. What you'll find, if you do it, is that the person you ask will thank you for the opportunity to help. People want to help. They want to feel valued. No one wants to take it all on but a little help here and there, when accumulated can give a caregiver a respite break. I remember when my husband was confined to the house and shouldn't be left alone the entire day, but I had to work to pay the bills, women from my church would stop by and read the daily Bible readings with him. Each one took a turn. He looked forward to it so much and I had the peace of mind that someone was stopping in to see him. People can't help you if you don't ask.

Avoid negativity. Negativity is contagious and caregivers are vulnerable to negative thoughts and feelings because they tend to be a bit overwhelmed by their responsibilities and a bit angry about the turn their lives have taken. Negative people drag you down. Stay away from nasty people, sarcastic people. Try to surround yourself with people who are optimistic, compassionate, and funny. Nothing relieves stress like a good belly laugh. Make it your business to find something to laugh about each day. I have a friend who trolls social media sites looking for humor and she sends me a daily laugh. Sometimes they make me laugh out loud. It helps me maintain perspective about the things in life that are truly important and helps me to give up worrying about the small stuff.

At the end of each day ask yourself, "Have I done all I could today, given the time, talent, and resources I have?" If you can answer yes, you've done enough. The question is not "Did I do a perfect job?" or "Was I the best at what I did?" Just "Did I do the best I could in the reality of the world in which I live?" ♦

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Safety Begins at Home

by Jennifer Wilson

If you're among America's 54 million caregivers, knowing how to evacuate a loved one or how a loved one can take shelter during an emergency may not be as easy as just stepping out a door, or crawling out a window, especially if your loved one has mobility challenges and physical issues. Not only do you have to consider how you yourself will get out of the house during an emergency, but how will you get to your loved one to make sure they get out? How realistic is it for you to assume that your loved one will be able to assist themselves to evacuate the house or to take shelter some place other than their room?

These are just a few of the questions that a caregiver must sit down and think through to arrive at a much-needed safety plan for their loved one. Once a safety plan has been created, it is wise to rehearse it, making sure that there are no other problems that might be incurred during an emergency.

It's also a good idea to discuss a finalized evacuation plan with other family members who may not live with you, as well as with neighbors, friends, and any other personal care attendants that may be a part of the in-home caregiving team. Talk about the dangers of fire, severe weather, earthquakes, and other emergencies. This way, people other than the caregiver will know where to locate a loved one in a timely manner and assist with anything they may need at that moment, should their caregiver not be able to do so.



When devising your in-home, emergency preparedness plan, a good resource to contact is your local chapter of the Red Cross. They can tell you what kind of natural disasters occur in your area, how to prepare for each, and how you will be warned of an emergency.

Also, many communities extend special assistance to those who have mobility problems by registering these people with a local fire department or emergency management office. Professional help will then be administered quickly and with priority in an emergency to people with physical limitations and mobility challenges.

If you are a caregiver who is working outside the home, ask your supervisor about any emergency plans that may be in effect at your workplace. For example, some places will not allow employees to leave for home until an "all clear" has been given by local authorities, so caregivers need to take a policy like this into consideration when creating an at-home safety plan for a loved one.

If you are the caregiver of a special-needs child who is mainstreamed into the public school or daycare system, ask the teachers or directors about emergency plans for the school, and how it will include and affect your young loved one.

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48 Mental Breaks for Caregiver, continued from page 4

- ♦ Running through sprinklers
- ♦ Laughing for absolutely no reason at all
- ♦ Having someone tell you that you're beautiful
- ♦ Laughing at an inside joke
- ♦ Friends
- ♦ Accidentally overhearing someone say something nice about you
- ♦ Waking up and realizing you still have a few hours left to sleep
- ♦ Your first kiss
- ♦ Making new friends or spending time with old ones
- ♦ Playing with a new puppy
- ♦ Having someone play with your hair
- ♦ Sweet dreams
- ♦ Hot chocolate
- ♦ Road trips with friends
- ♦ Swinging on swings
- ♦ Wrapping presents under the Christmas tree while eating cookies and drinking eggnog
- ♦ Song lyrics printed inside your new CD so you can sing along without feeling stupid
- ♦ Going to a really good concert
- ♦ Winning a competitive game
- ♦ Making chocolate chip cookies
- ♦ Spending time with close friends
- ♦ Seeing smiles and hearing laughter from those friends...
- ♦ Holding hands with someone you care about
- ♦ Running into an old friend and realizing that some things (good or bad) never change
- ♦ Riding the best roller coasters over and over
- ♦ Watching the expression on someone's face as they open a much desired present from you
- ♦ Watching the sunrise
- ♦ Getting out of bed every morning and thanking God for another beautiful day.... ♦

- a first-aid kit, prescription medicines, and an extra pair of glasses
- a supply of water (one gallon per person per day); store water in sealed, unbreakable containers and replace every six months
- a supply of non-perishable food and a non-electric can opener, plus any special foods your loved one may require
- include extra products like adult diapers, wipes, lotion, and other hygiene items that don't need water to use
- have extra wheelchair batteries charged and ready to go
- have on-hand full, oxygen tanks, extra medications, catheters, food for guide or service dogs and any other special equipment needed
- a change of clothing and rain gear for you and your loved one
- extra blankets or sleeping bags
- the list of family physicians, relatives or friends who should be notified if you or your loved one are injured
- a list of the style and serial numbers of medical devices such as pacemakers or special batteries for essential medical equipment
- an extra set of car keys

During a disaster, anything that can move, fall, break or cause a fire is an added hazard. Before an emergency happens, go around your home and look specifically for items that might pose a danger to you and your loved one during a disaster. Make sure that shelving is securely fastened to the walls, and that any large, heavy objects are placed on lower shelves or on the floor. Also, hang pictures and mirrors away from beds; larger pictures or mirrors should be bolted to the wall.

Observe electrical wiring around your home, and repair any wires found to be defective or hazardous. Have a shut-off valve or switch for oxygen equipment near your loved one's bed or chair, so they (or you) can turn it off quickly if there is a fire. Secure your water heater by strapping it to a nearby wall in order to keep it from falling over during a disaster. Repair cracks found in the ceilings or foundation and brace any overhead light fixtures. If you have a chimney, have a professional inspect it for any cracks or weak spots and have the appropriate repairs made. This will make it more difficult for it to come crashing through your roof during a disaster. Invest in fire extinguishers and smoke detectors. You may even consider installing home sprinklers.

There are many things that caregivers can do to help themselves and their loved ones prepare for any type of emergency or disaster, but it is best to be ready well in advance. Remember to contact your local fire department or your community's emergency management office for help with your preparations. You can also contact the American Red Cross National Headquarters and ask them for information regarding a chapter near you. ❖



Caring for the Caregiver, continued from page 6

- Accept the facts and deal with your situation the best that you can.
- Seek professional help whenever necessary.
- Share the burden of caring and caregiving with family members and other interested persons.
- Talk about your problems with a trusted person.
- Don't be too shy, proud, or afraid to seek help with caregiving.
- Become aware of the limits of your caregiving abilities.
- Maintain social activities and important relationships.
- Get away from the responsibilities from time to time.
- Pace yourself. You may be responsible for caregiving for many years.
- Work off anger with physical activity.
- Plan ahead to avoid crises where possible.
- Live one day at a time.
- Recognize the worst-case scenario but hope for the best.
- Keep your sense of humor

Guide prepared by the Atlanta Area Chapter of the Alzheimer's Association ❖

Active Daily Living

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