

## Removing guilt from caregiving

If you are not a caregiver now, it is likely that you will be in the future. Many stresses go along with caregiving.

Caregivers often feel a sense of guilt because they are not sure what their older loved one wants. Should a crisis arise, guessing how to fulfill a relative's wishes adds to the emotional turmoil, causing more stress.

### **Discuss your relative's wishes**

Relief comes from knowing what the person wants. If you can find out now what your loved one wants later, it will decrease the stress experienced in everyday living and in a crisis. The opportunity to talk is often welcomed by your loved ones, as it also may cease their anxiety.

### **Guilt common**

Caregivers often feel guilty when they and the ones cared for do not have the same wants. Realize that it can be difficult for older people to change. Allowing your loved ones to make their own decisions and take some risks boosts their morale and helps to preserve their emotional health and independence.

Doing a job poorly is another frequent fear that can cause caregiver guilt. Turning to someone else for help does not mean you are not capable or that you have failed. By taking a break when you need one, you will find yourself able to be a better caregiver.

### **Learn about illnesses, finances**

Knowing about the disability or illness your loved one suffers from can help. When you know what to expect, some fear and stress are eliminated. Awareness of chronic conditions or the stages of disease helps you to deal with the illness.

Another frequent cause of anxiety is financial worry. To avoid stressful surprises, it is helpful to understand your loved one's finances.

### **To eliminate caregiver guilt**

Some things you can do to eliminate caregiver guilt include:

- **Avoid burnout.** Know your personal limits. Learn about respite programs in your area and take a break.
- **Social workers can help** you find respite care to fit your needs.
- **Allow some risks.** Let your older loved one exercise independence. Older adults are happier making their own decisions. Remember, seniors have many of the same needs as their children, including love, respect, dignity and independence.
- **Contact support groups.** For caregivers, support is a tremendous help in easing their sense of burden and improving emotional health. Many support groups focus on a specific disease or disability. You can learn what other caregivers are going through and get notes on research.
- **Share responsibilities.** Lessen your burden by sharing caregiving responsibilities with family members, friends or professional caregivers such as home health personnel.

### **If you need help**

Caregiving can seem to be a burden when you are over stressed by responsibility or if you feel you are not appreciated. If you are feeling overwhelmed, talk to a friend, relative or clergy, or talk to a counselor, whose objective viewpoint can help you sort things out. To make an appointment, call (810) 257-3742. In an emergency, call (810) 257-3740, or toll free at (877) 346-3648, where a counselor is available 24 hours a day. © <http://www.genhs.org>