

## **CAREGIVERS NEED CARE, TOO**

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"It is one of the most beautiful compensations of life, that no man can sincerely try to help another without helping himself." *Ralph Waldo Emerson*

At some point in our lives all of us will assume the role of caregiver. As parents, we are caregivers for our children. As children, it's probable that we will one day become the caregiver for our parents. If we are married or in a committed relationship, we may need to care for our spouse or significant other if they become sick or incapacitated. In other words – if we are alive and in a relationship with others, there is a pretty good chance that we may ultimately be responsible for another's well-being.

Being a parent is stressful. We naturally want to provide the best care possible for our children. But in this case of care-giving, the outcome is rewarding and joyous as children grow into responsible adults.

It's much more difficult to be the primary caregiver for a parent, spouse, or friend who is elderly, in failing health, or coping with diagnosis and treatment of a serious illness. It's especially hard because we're not assured of a positive outcome. These are often end of life situations, and they come much too soon. We are rarely prepared for the emotional rollercoaster that ensues.

Remember - caregivers need care too! If you become overrun by grief, guilt, and stress, your ability to help is diminished. Self-care is not selfish. It's NECESSARY. Allow yourself to have emotions. It's natural to feel somewhat sad, depressed, and tired, but don't let this impair your functioning or put your health at risk. Ask for help.

Don't try to "do it all" alone. Take care of yourself physically, spiritually, and emotionally. Maintain healthy eating habits and exercise to relieve stress. Open up to family and friends. Seek out spiritual guidance. Create a routine for yourself and stay involved in life. Investigate support groups. Don't be manipulated by your patient. And, recognize that care-giving is hard. It's also the ultimate act of love.

A helpful website for caregivers is [www.caregiver.com](http://www.caregiver.com). You may also contact Ellen Harris Licensed Mental Health Counselor at 239-404-0862, [eharrislmhc@comcast.net](mailto:eharrislmhc@comcast.net) or [www.ellenharriscounseling.com](http://www.ellenharriscounseling.com).

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