

COPING WITH CAREGIVING

By Donna Deos

Last month we talked about Finding Balance. This month I want to keep that all in mind but turn our focus to Coping with Caregiving. I feel it is a very important topic for us to cover, especially at this time of year. This is the time that we see our family more often and we see the changes in them and begin to wonder and worry and our wheels start turning on what we should be doing to help them.

It's also a naturally more stressful time of year because there is even more on our plates getting ready for all of the holidays and parties and entertaining and shopping and gift giving. More to do doesn't make life any easier, does it?!

So, first of all, if you like what's in this article, I have a program called *Coping with Caregiving* that is available on my website. It is intentionally priced to be affordable and makes a great gift for all of the caregivers you know who seem to be struggling to find their way as the to-do list continually grows and their time and energy wither away.

Okay, let's get started. How do we cope with caregiving? Well, most of us don't. We just plug along and suffer in silence doing the best we can in each moment. What should we be doing?

First, we should be feeling our feelings and letting them out.

Second, we should be checking in with ourselves and making sure we are healthy, well rested, eating right and happy.

Third, we should be speaking up to the people around us and letting them know what is going on. If we don't share with them then they don't know and cannot help us.

Fourth, we should be accepting the help they offer. I know this is very hard, but it is also very important. You simply can't do it all yourself. They are offering for a reason so let them in.

Fifth, we should be exploring other options. Options of other places for our loved ones to live that include the assistance they need; other options of people we can hire to help them where they are; and other options for other help that is out there. The key is to stop trying to do it all yourself! Believe me, I



know firsthand how it all sneaks up on you. I've lived it.

You start out helping with a thing or two and before you know it you are the go-to person for everything. You didn't even see it coming or notice it. You were just doing what you felt you should for your loved one.

Did you know – there are people out there who never become a caregiver for their aging loved ones? Sure, some people never need caregivers and that is absolutely great. I am not talking about them. The people I am talking about are the ones who have great boundaries and who never even had caregiving for their loved ones cross their minds. These are the people who automatically go to “how do I get this done for them without actually doing it myself?” There is no shame in that. Actually, I say Bravo for them! It's not how I was raised, but that doesn't make it bad or wrong. It's just different. Actually, from where I sit now, it looks wonderful and brilliant and I am jealous! Look at all of the time and stress and agony they have saved themselves. They still find the solution for their loved one, but they do not assume all of the responsibility of all of the DOING.

Why do I tell you about this? Because I want you to know that it really is okay to have boundaries and to say No. It is okay to find other solutions and other people to do the caregiving. It does not mean that you love your loved one any less. It just means you love yourself a bit more too. You value yourself enough to say – I can't do all of this. There are some people who will try to make you feel guilty. Stop for

a minute. Take a look at who they are. What are they doing? Are they actively caregiving for their aging loved one? Do they really understand the shoes in which you walk? If not, stop listening to them. They have no idea how much you are doing and how it feels to be you. Also, if someone is trying to use guilt on you for any reason you really need to question that. If they are using guilt it is because they are manipulating you. They are trying to control you and that is not okay.

Okay, I'm not saying to all out rebel and abandon your caregiver duties. What I am saying is most caregivers need to do less and ask for more help from other people. There is no shame in that. You should not have to be the only one doing everything. Also, there is a tremendous value to your time and energy. The other people in the picture need to recognize that and acknowledge it.

So, if you have a sibling that is far away and unhelpful don't take any guff from them. Instead, start filling them in on what's going on so they begin to see the size and depth of the situation so they can begin to feel your pain and understand how much you are doing and why you are feeling stressed, looking tired and worn out and so on. They don't know and don't understand because they aren't in your shoes. So, paint them a picture. Include them in what is going on and how it makes you feel, how it makes the one you are caregiving for feel. When they are included in knowing what is going on they understand and can find ways to help even from far away.

Coping with caregiving means that you are opening up and being vulnerable and willing to accept help. Caregivers are Givers. We aren't good at receiving. The key is to turn that around and allow yourself to receive.

Even by talking with your sibling about what is going on gives you an outlet to express yourself and get some of the stress and emotion out. That in and of itself is a wonderful gift and can make a huge difference.

If you are the sibling that is far away I hope this helps you as well.

I know it is hard to be far away and unable to help. I've seen many people in this situation. Coming home for the holidays reminds you how much you are needed and how much you are missing out on.

There are programs like Skype, Zoom and FaceTime that let you video conference with your family. Maybe you can set up regular calls so you feel more involved and helpful. You can also help by encouraging those on the front lines to get regular time away from the situation and to hire help. Just being emotionally available for your loved ones is a wonderful gift you have to offer.

We all have a role in this and we can all be helpful in a variety of different ways. If you need any help with any of this, let me know. I am always here for you!

*All my best,
Donna*



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