

Reasonable Expectations

By Donna Deos

I was speaking to a caregiver's support group recently and reached the point in my talk about Reasonable Expectations – boy did that hit home.

Very often as caregivers, and people in general, we take on more and more and never stop to think of what is a reasonable amount. We just do it because we know it needs to be done. Often we feel like there is no one else who can or would do it if we do not. We frequently operate on auto pilot just doing and doing and doing until we reach a point of overwhelm and eventually burn out.

I realize when the world around you is crumbling and shifting it is hard to stop and evaluate. We love the people who need our help so we drop everything and make it happen. This plan works for the short term, but for the long term it's a plan for disaster.

So, what are reasonable expectations? How much can we expect of ourselves and those around us? Our version of reasonable could be very different from that of others. People who are full of energy and have high expectations can have a very different perception of what is reasonable to expect from others. Folks with a full plate already could have a much lower impression of the word reasonable.

To find your comfort level with reasonable you really need to look at the whole picture. How much is already on your plate? How much more is facing you with the new scenario? How long will you need to keep going to fill this need? Is it a short term thing – one week? Is it long term and possibly endless in timeframe? How do you really feel about all of that?

When looking at what reasonable means you also need to look at what will it take in terms of finances, physical work, worry, stress and so on. Sometimes a simple task of helping out for a particular crisis comes with much more than you think.

This is why it's easy at first to just jump in and do. It's after a while of the doing, without a certain end in sight that we end up starting to say "OMG! What have I gotten myself into? How much longer can I keep this up? What is my plan and who can help me?!"



This is where having someone to help you with a plan comes in! You need to have an overall plan that explains the goals you are trying to achieve. In this plan you need to know the various components of the plan (steps or projects within it), then you need to break the steps and projects into manageable pieces. You also need to look at who can help you and with what. We also need to look at other things on our plate that could go away so that we can add the new items. It's okay to let go of other things.

This is the step we usually don't take. Instead we try to do it all ourselves piling on more and more. There is nothing wrong with wanting or needing help or letting other things go. Actually, it's wise to get the help. The hardest part is asking for it, I know. We never want to think we aren't capable of all we feel should be done. Realizing you want or need help and then asking for it is not an admission of inadequacy. It does not deem you incapable, it merely shows that you get it. You see the bigger picture here. You have boundaries and care enough about yourself, the other person and your other commitments to know when and where to draw the line. Or even that a line needs to be drawn.

Being the sole supporting caregiver 24/7 is not fair to either of you. Everyone needs time to themselves, time to do things that bring them joy. "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy." All work and no play makes you cranky and irritable too! It makes you no fun and downright difficult to be around sometimes.

We all end up taking out our frustrations on the person closest to

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us. Don't we?! Well, when you are a full time caregiver, you end up taking it out on the loved one you are caring for. They take their frustrations of needing care out on you as well. [That's right – almost nobody who requires caregiving wants to be in that situation.] It's unfortunate, but that is how it works, we take out our stresses on each other inadvertently. If you get away from each other for periods of time this will lessen. You will get along better and you will be better able to serve them in their time of need. They will be better able to receive your assistance too.

Also, you need to think about what is reasonable when asking others for help. If they say no it's okay to ask why. It could be that they aren't comfortable with what you asked, but could do something else that would help you just as much in

a different way. Or, they may have ideas of who else you could ask. Likewise, they may not be able to help out today, but next week could be better. Maybe they can only help one day, but once they do that they get the confidence to be able to do more. Take it in small, manageable pieces for all of you. At the end of the day, every little bit helps!

If there's anything I can do, let me know.

Oh, and I had some great feedback on last month's article on yard work help. High school students often have required volunteer hours they need to complete prior to graduation. Maybe you have one nearby who can help you with your fall clean up, or your electronics, or whatever!

Until next month, take good care.

Donna

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