

Defining the Needs of the Person and the Caregiver

Although there are many degrees of care, being a caregiver can be a time-consuming, demanding and exhausting job. You are caring for someone else's needs, responsible for helping a once independent person perform simple or complex tasks and functions. Everyone asks about the person you care for—and never about you. You may start to feel isolated, angry, guilty and confused. What about you? What are your needs?

On the other hand, being a care recipient is not easy, either. Depending on someone else to perform daily tasks can be demeaning and depressing, and the care recipient may have so many needs that it is difficult to determine which are the most pressing.

In short, although the caregiving relationship is often based on love and concern, it also can be mired in conflicting emotions and needs. How can these be sorted out?

Care Recipient's Needs and Wants

Determine what the care recipient needs and wants by asking them, involving them in discussions and observing their behavior. Some of the questions to ask about the care recipient include:

- What does the care recipient want?
- What kind of situation can the care recipient accept?
- What kind of care does the elder's medical and/or mental condition require?
- What would make the care recipient happy?
- What are the basic rights of the care recipient?
- How does he or she feel about his or her condition and care?



Caregiver's Needs and Wants

Although as a caregiver you will often be the last to receive care, you must make yourself a priority. After all, if you are not well, you will not be able to provide care for anyone else. Ask yourself some of the following questions:

- What do I need to be happy and healthy?
- What kind of support do I need?
- What sort of situation do I want?
- What do I want for the care recipient? For my own family? For myself?
- What are my basic rights as a caregiver?
- What do my spouse, children and work need?

Solutions and Compromises

As with any human relationship, that between the caregiver and the care recipient involves compromises and imperfect solutions. These might be the best that you can do. Work with the care recipient to determine a course of action that is amenable to both of you.

Some questions to ask on the road to compromise include the following:

- What resources—financial, legal, medical—are available in the community?
- Can someone be hired to help with certain tasks or activities?
- What can other family members do?
- Are friends and neighbors available to help?
- Is respite care or day care an option?
- What is the caregiver willing to give up for the care recipient?
- What is the care recipient willing to give up for the caregiver?