

Changing Roles



For the Parent and Adult Child

One of the most difficult things to deal with as an adult child or other relative caring for an aging family member is that gradually your roles will be different. You will assume new roles—financial, legal, household manager, etc. No longer is the parent the one with all the answers, the one who knows everything, the one who will take care of you if things go wrong.

This does not mean that your parent is not still your parent. It does mean, however, that as a caregiver, you must make decisions for or with your parent. With this responsibility comes a whole host of emotions—some negative, some positive. All of them are a normal response to the dramatic shift in your relationship with your parent.



If you will be the primary caretaker, understand that you can make choices about how you will do this. Will you hire help? How will other siblings and relatives be involved? Will the parent remain at home, move in with you, or live in a nursing home or assisted living facility?

To the degree that your parent is willing and able, involve them in the decision-making process.

These are some of the most complicated—and important—choices that either of you will ever make. If possible, try to take the parent's feelings into consideration. What would he or she enjoy or appreciate? What preferences did your parent have prior to this illness?

Reactions of the Adult Child

As your parent ages and your roles begin to change, you will be experiencing many emotions. All of them are normal responses to a challenging time. These emotions may include:

- Anger
- Frustration
- Depression
- Guilt
- Sadness
- Competency
- Peace
- Resentment
- Loneliness

Reactions of the Disabled Parent

Your parent, too, will be experiencing many new, and sometimes overwhelming, emotions. Some of these may include:

- Shame
- Incompetency
- Fear
- Anger
- Worthlessness
- Gratitude
- Denial

Choices

One of the most important things to do, as an adult child, is to realize that you have the ability to make choices. Try to let go of the emotional baggage from the past and to shape a new sense of self in relation to your aging parent.

TIPS FOR THE ADULT CHILD ASSUMING THE ROLE OF CAREGIVER

Here are some tips that can help you ease the transition into new roles for both you and your parent:

GET HELP EARLY—caregiving assistance, counseling, financial advice, support groups.

INVOLVE ALL FAMILY MEMBERS in the caregiving process.

EDUCATE YOURSELF about aging and disease.

RESPECT the dignity of your parent.

RECOGNIZE YOUR OWN EMOTIONS, and those of your parent.

ACKNOWLEDGE YOUR NEED to care for yourself and your own family first.

FORGIVE YOUR PARENT for not being perfect—and for not being in control.

FORGIVE YOURSELF for your perceived inadequacies or emotions.

ACCEPT THE CHANGING ROLES and circumstances.

COMMUNICATE—with your parent first, then with siblings, doctors, friends.

ALLOW as much independence as possible.