

# Caregiving and Guilt

Many caregivers feel that they struggle trying to balance love, caregiving and guilt. According to a 1999 survey conducted by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, more than 52 million Americans care for a disabled or sick family member. Although most caregivers bear their burden with love, social workers say caregiving is so demanding that most people feel inadequate.

Experts warn that emotions such as guilt can extract a heavy toll on the health of the caregiver—hurting everyone involved. Of all the emotional hurdles family caregivers face—including anger and resentment—guilt is the most pervasive and dangerous. Often, there's tremendous guilt in feeling we aren't doing enough.

## **Guilt becomes an issue when caregivers—**

- have expectations that are unrealistic.
- find it difficult to ask for help or parcel out tasks to friends or professionals.
- feel that somehow there's something they could, might, should, would have done.
- feel powerless.



## **What you can do to prevent guilt—**

- Get help from community programs and professional resources.
- Ask family or friends for help.
- Get access to information, especially during a crisis.
- Consider joining a support group—either in person or on the Internet—so you can share feelings and frustrations with others who understand your situation.
- Acknowledge your limits.
- Forgive yourself for your mistakes.
- Learn to delegate caregiving chores.
- Remember that your best is good enough.

## **You Can't Repay your Parents**

You may think that you owe your parents care because they cared for you as a child. The first thing to remember is that you can never repay your parents. If you approach caregiving from that frame of reference, you will always be behind the game; you'll never be able to do everything for them that they did for you, and they shouldn't expect you to. Rather, approach caregiving as someone who loves and wants to care for your parents (or other aging relative)—not as someone who owes a debt.

## **Guilt as a Sickness**

Guilt can eat away at you without your knowing it. You may feel guilty that you cannot give as much time as you'd like. Or you may feel guilty about putting your relative in a nursing home. Or your aging relative might make you feel guilty for the quality or quantity of care you are able to provide. No matter how you look at it, this guilt is not healthy. You need to worry first about what you can provide, how much time you can spend, and what you need to keep yourself and your family happy. Don't feel guilty about putting yourself and your immediate family first. Guilt will negatively impact your caregiving abilities, and you may even begin to take out your frustration (possibly unconsciously) on your aging relative.

## **Moving Beyond Guilt: Forgiveness and Acceptance**

The best thing you can do as a caregiver is to move beyond all forms of guilt—to forgiveness and acceptance, both of yourself and the person you care for. Try to remove all the layers of negative emotion to get to the real love and care at the core of your relationship with this person. Provide the best care that you can—or ensure that others provide it. Moving beyond guilt to forgiveness and acceptance will make you a happier and more confident caregiver.