

Protecting Personal Self-Esteem

As a caregiver, you may find yourself always thinking about everyone else—your aging relative, your children or your spouse. You're probably the last person you think about, if you think about yourself at all. The constant care that you give others, in other words, is putting you in danger of losing your sense of self.

Ironically, however, the more time you spend thinking about yourself and boosting your own self-esteem, the better care you can provide others. An unhappy, unfulfilled person with low self-esteem can provide very little useful care to others. And who cares for the caregiver? You. You are the one person that can make sure that you get everything that you need.

But how can you protect your own sense of value, worth and self-esteem? What can you do to ensure that you are taken care of, as well?

Remember Your Interests

As a caregiver it is easy to forget the things you once enjoyed doing. You have too many things to worry about to remember those interests and hobbies. What were they? Did you once enjoy reading? Swimming? Biking? Attending concerts? Meeting with friends? Going to the movies? Think back to what you did before your elder got sick—even before you had kids. Try to remember those hobbies. You probably don't have time to spend all day Saturday gardening anymore, but you might be able to put a few flowers in pots. You may not be able to go out to the movies every Friday night, but you can rent a video and watch it—maybe make it a popcorn party, with your elder, kids, spouse and the whole gang together. Don't underestimate the power of these activities to boost your sense of self-worth and self-esteem.

Don't Be Consumed by Caregiving

Caregiving can be a difficult and all-consuming task. Try not to let it be. If you sense yourself getting overwhelmed, you are probably becoming consumed. Step back and take stock of the situation. Only you know your breaking point, stop before you get there. Don't be ashamed to ask for help, or to look for social services in your community. You'll be helping both yourself and your elder if you avoid being consumed by your role as caregiver.

Take a Break

Who has time for a vacation? Though it might seem that a vacation is an impossible dream, it may in fact be a necessity. Vacations and breaks are an opportunity to reassess your life, to remember who you are and to remove yourself from the stresses of everyday life. Try to take an hour break here and there, and a week's vacation now and then as well. Find respite programs, day care programs, or a willing friend or relative who can fill in for you as a caregiver while you're gone. You'll be happier for it.



Finding time to pursue your own hobbies will help you maintain your own sense of value, worth and self-esteem.