

# **Helping Aging Parents and Family Members**

“The most difficult part of aging is getting old.”

**Caring for another person is like running a long-distance race. You have to establish a pace in helping that you can sustain, while maintaining other areas of your life. See caregiving as a team effort. Recruit a LARGE team. Involve distant family members by giving them jobs to do and asking them to provide breaks for you. Since caregiving comes with an extra load of stress be very careful to maintain your own health by MAKING exercise a priority, eating right and staying away from alcohol. Listen to your emotions –the dashboard of your life. Face these feelings and the race will become much more enjoyable.**

## **1. Caring for their heart and yours:**

- ☞ Balance caring for the emotional needs of an aging parent or family member with caring for your own needs.
- ☞ Caregiving becomes more challenging when emotional needs are not met.
- ☞ Multiple roles of caregiver: Adult child, parent, nurse, doctor, lawyer, (warden!).... Come with multiple stressors.
- ☞ Sandwich Generation – caregiving on two ends of the spectrum - kids and parents.

## **2. Allow feelings to diagnose the problem:**

- ☞ What are my/there feelings telling me?
- ☞ Take time to feel. - Allow your loved one to feel.
- ☞ Numbing the feelings through distractions or busyness only delays the problem.

## **3. Three emotional issues to manage:**

**A. Change:** Most of us don't like change –especially when it is out of our control.

- ☞ Acknowledge what is happening – as it is happening – Pain is more tolerable in small bites.
- ☞ Feel the truth and then focus on the best to make of it. It's like adjusting to a hot bath a toe at a time.
- ☞ Let your life adjust to it. Many adjustments over time will help.

**B. Control:** We don't like losing control – neither do they. It's scary --- and ok.

- ☞ We don't like it because we feel helpless to stop their pain. - And it reminds us of our own.
- ☞ We don't want to believe our parent will no longer be there for us.
- ☞ We don't want the responsibility of attending constantly to someone's medical needs or worry what is happening while we are away from them.

**C. Contributions:** They are scared. They feel very vulnerable, and many feel like they have nothing left to offer anyone.

- ☞ They need some sense of control, predictability. Don't design for them the life you want - design the life they want.
- ☞ Story – a narrative of life. Consider how this story will end or continue. Their story and yours.
- ☞ Help them evaluate their lives. What are the bright spots. Anything left undone? Unforgiven,
- ☞ What legacy do they want to leave behind? Their life counted – and still will.
- ☞ Assist them in passing on the family history to children and grandchildren through pictures, stories and memorabilia.
- ☞ Assist them in passing their wisdom on to others who may not have grandparents.
- ☞ There is power in the words of the elderly –they often don't realize it.
  - Blessing, warning, forgiveness, encouragement, wisdom ....we all can remember words that stuck in our hearts.
- ☞ You will weather this time much better if you are looking for ways to assist them in living on.

**You can become the vehicle for these positive transitions.  
The person before you may change into someone you barely recognize.  
You can hold onto is the legacy that will live on.**