



Top 4 Caregiving Misconceptions

December 2011

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Caregiving is a roller coaster ride. Unexpected twists and turns derail even the most experienced helpers. If we carry misconceptions into our caregiving role, our ride becomes infinitely more treacherous. Here are four of the most common misconceptions among caregivers, and how to move beyond them.

“I can do it all.”

Ann Straw of Los Altos, Cal., balanced a busy family and work schedule with caring for her critically ill father. At the same time, her beloved 14-year-old terrier, Ollie, declined rapidly. “I was laying plastic all over the house to protect the floors from Ollie’s frequent accidents,” she remembers. “I finally admitted I couldn’t do it all.” She made the agonizing decision to bring Ollie to the local shelter. “It was time,” she adds. “Sadly, my dad died the

next day.”

Lesson learned:

Patterns of chronic caregiving are often formed at an early age, and with them comes difficulty asking for help. While reaching out to others for support can feel uncomfortable, it becomes easier with practice. Make it a point to ask for assistance, even if you don't think you need it now, to get into the habit of seeking and accepting help. Don't know where to start? Go to Net of Care (www.netofcare.org), the Family Caregiver Program at Beth Israel Medical Center in New York, for advice on having crucial conversations.

“Healthcare professionals will steer me through the maze.”

“My husband David developed Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) while on tour in Desert Storm and Operation Iraqi Freedom,” Karen Grey from Indiana, Penn., offers. She turned to a military assistance non-profit and the Veteran's Administration for help. “It didn't take me long to realize our only option was to figure things out and learn to live successfully with PTSD, by ourselves.”

Lesson learned:

Educating ourselves about medications, medical procedures and treatments, healthy choices, and insurance coverage is no longer an option but a necessity—whether we are coping with a health condition ourselves or assisting a loved one. A healthy doctor-patient relationship allows for questions, concerns and even a second opinion, when appropriate. If the thought of this is overwhelming, you may benefit from talking to a caregiver coach, someone who can support caregivers through the healthcare maze. Websites such as www.caregiving.com are up and

running to help caregivers secure a coaching helper.

“The person in my care will appreciate my help.”

New York native Milton Selig begs to differ. “My wife and I had 56 wonderful years together,” he says. “She was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s, and suddenly I became the enemy.” Milton often visits the center where his wife spends her days. He tries to please her but admits, “I do the best I can and then I let it go.”

Lesson learned:

The inability to let of your expectations and accept your relationship with the person in your care as it is now can hinder healing and well-being. If this is your challenge, author Hugh Prather suggests the following in *The Little Book of Letting Go: A Revolutionary 30-Day Program to Cleanse Your Mind, Lift Your Spirit and Replenish Your Soul*: “Problems assault us to the degree they preoccupy us. The key to release, rest and inner freedom is not the elimination of all external difficulties. It is letting go of our pattern of reactions to those difficulties.”

“When this is over, life will get back to normal.”

Trista Stockwell’s son Shawn was only 7 years old when a heart ailment led to a transplant at age 9. Since then, Shawn was “playing soccer and looking forward to junior high school like a normal 12 year old boy,” offers Trista, of Eagle Lake, Alaska. But recently, tests revealed complications. As family and friends rally around Shawn, his mother reflects, “For us, there is no such thing as normal anymore.”

Lesson learned:

It's normal to grieve the loss of the life you've been used to—in fact, pushing down the grief will only prolong the heartache. Everyone grieves in his or her own time frame, so be patient with yourself. Grief counselors recommend seeking out quiet, peace and rest to help move beyond sadness and toward acceptance of a “new normal.” If you become stuck in the process, it is best to seek professional help.

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