



## **Caregiver's Questions and Answers**

November 2011

by Patricia Smith

Founder, Compassion Fatigue Awareness Project

Web: [www.compassionfatigue.org](http://www.compassionfatigue.org)

[www.facebook.com/compassionfatigue](http://www.facebook.com/compassionfatigue)

Media Contact for [www.compassionfatigue.org](http://www.compassionfatigue.org):

Dell Richards Publicity

916-455-4790

[dell@dellrichards.com](mailto:dell@dellrichards.com)

### **Question:**

My 70 year old mother is very naïve about people. I have read recently about the increase in scam artists who target the elderly. I am fearful my mother could fall prey to one of these crooks. She is very open about her finances and shares all of her investment information with others. I don't want to scold my mother, but I want her to understand that in today's world, privacy is very important. Do you have any thoughts on how to educate her without seeming bossy?

### **Answer:**

Of course, there are many ways to awaken your mother to the real threat of con artists. You are very smart to want to protect her assets and privacy. A recent study shows that financial

exploitation of the elderly by commercial predators has reached \$2.9 billion annually. And the bilking is expected to rise considerably with the baby boomers adding to the mix. Unfortunately, we must be wary of not only commercial predators, but family members and caregivers, as well. First of all, you must have Power of Attorney to legally access your mother's accounts so you can police them. Does she do her banking online? If so, check her account regularly, every day, if possible. Watch for the following signs of abuse: unusually large withdrawals, checks written to "cash," checks signed by your mother, but filled out by another, large loans against home equity, or expensive gifts to a caregiver. For more help in your location, call your district attorney's office. They usually have an Elder & Adult Financial Abuse unit. For a list of scams, go to the National Association of Bunco Investigators at [www.nabihq.org/en-us/cons\\_and\\_scams](http://www.nabihq.org/en-us/cons_and_scams). You can also connect with your local Bar Association or the National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys at [www.naela.org](http://www.naela.org). If your mother resists your assistance, keep working at it. This is too important of an issue to put on the back burner.

**Question:**

My 26-year-old daughter is a wonderful nurse. She is well-loved by everyone including both colleagues and those in her care. There is a problem though. While she takes excellent care of others, she neglects many areas of her own life. Even though she has the funds, her bills aren't paid on time. Her apartment is always in disarray and her clothes are often unwashed and un-ironed. I can't even begin to wonder what she eats for dinner, if she eats at all. Needless to say, this has all led to a low credit rating. I am concerned for her future and a little confused about her lack of self care since she was taught those skills growing up. Do you have any suggestions? She is very sensitive and the last thing I want to do is upset or embarrass her, but I feel I need to step in before she destroys her life.

**Answer:**

Unfortunately what you describe is common among caregivers. If your daughter's pattern of caring for others without adequate self-care isn't remedied, she can begin to experience debilitating stress, burnout and compassion fatigue. This pattern of being "other-directed" usually takes hold in the early formation years. When a young child is praised for being compassionate, caring and selfless, this can become the core of their self-esteem. Chronic caring for others becomes a way of life. Does this sound like your daughter? If so, it's time to begin a kind and thoughtful discussion. Speak to her from your perspective. Explain your concerns for her and for her future. Let her know you are on her side. Your daughter is currently overwhelmed with her life. To help move her in a healthier direction, provide one-on-one support in the areas that have become obvious to you. Help her organize her bills, or better yet, set up online bill pay. Introduce her to your favorite cleaners and give her a gift certificate where her clothes can be properly laundered. Shop with her at a local Farmer's Market where she can purchase fresh fruits and vegetables for her meals. Helping her navigate the path to wellness might take time. Often those who provide care aren't willing to accept care. But don't lose hope. Modeling healthy self-care behaviors is probably the most effective way for your daughter to follow suit. If you have serious concerns about her well-being, suggest a visit to a mental health professional.

**Question:**

My dearest friend died at age 79 recently. I am the Executor of her estate and have been given the responsibility of the two cats she left behind, Boris and Doris. In her will, she authorized me to bring the cats to the humane society, which I did. Unfortunately, I

was told the cats would be euthanized immediately due to lack of space. While I dislike cats very much, I couldn't find it in my heart to leave them there, so I brought them home with me. Now what?

**Answer:**

First of all, I am very sorry for your loss. Dear friends can brighten our lives in wonderful ways. On the other hand, friendships can often demand very odd favors, such as in your situation. Since it is obvious you do not want to take on two cats, which is perfectly legitimate, your next step is to find an appropriate home for them. Social networking has made this task easier than ever. One avenue is to post their photo on your Facebook page, if you have one. This gives your family and friends a chance to help out. Another is to connect with your local humane society or a feline rescue organization. It is obvious your friend cared greatly for her two animal companions, so you will want to honor her by finding a loving and caring home for them. Hopefully, you will locate a person of compassion who understands the two cats have spent their lives together and separating them could cause erratic feline behavior such as spraying and aggression. Be sure to adequately interview potential adopters. If you don't know what questions to ask, contact your nearest humane society and speak to someone who is knowledgeable in this area. Animal lovers everywhere applaud you for bringing Boris and Doris home from the humane society.

**Question:**

My elderly uncle is bedridden. As his caregiver, it is important to me that he look presentable and well-cared for when family and friends come to visit. Unfortunately, he doesn't share my opinion. He is happy to wear the same pajamas and robe day after day. I don't think this pattern is healthy. He has physical issues, but his

mind is extremely sharp. I am at wits end and finding I am not able to communicate with my uncle anymore because he is being so stubborn. Do you have ideas for me?

**Answer:**

If you know for sure your uncle's behavior isn't due to depression, and his poor self-care habits aren't bringing in rats or other small rodents, there probably isn't much you can do to spiff him up. Is there a chance his stubbornness is more about control and he is trying desperately to exert his independence? Is there a chance he doesn't care to be around those who come to visit? Caregivers often labor under the misconception that they can regulate the behaviors of those in their care. Healthy caregiving is more about service than about supervising; more about listening than talking. Before your communication with your uncle breaks down completely, allow him to voice his concerns in a safe environment with no arguments or suggestions overriding his opinions. If he needs you to launder his bedclothes and sheets on his schedule, allow him that kindness. Experts tell us we can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar. So try showering your uncle with catalogs full of handsome pajamas and robes. Fill his room with lovely fresh flowers and plants. Prepare hot tea and tasty goodies served on a lovely tray. Maybe in time your uncle will embrace your more gracious way of life and you won't have to worry that the bedbugs might bite.

**Question:**

I am having a hard time with the issue of organ and tissue donation. Both my mother and father are registered organ donors and I can't seem to come to terms with the thought of their organs being donated when they die. They are both currently healthy and able to care for themselves, but if anything happens, I will become the caregiver. Can you offer any help for someone like me?

**Answer:**

Your parents are to be commended. They have taken the proper steps to ensure their organs and tissue will be donated upon their deaths so that others might live. This is both thoughtful and kind. Last year, organ donors made more than 28,000 transplants possible. One organ donor can save up to 8 lives. Thousands of people die annually waiting for an organ. Your parents are now part of the solution to that problem. It is understandable that you are upset. You are projecting your inevitable grief and loss, and possibly attaching the organ and tissue donation to those sad emotions. Perhaps educating yourself more about this gift of life might be helpful to you. To learn more about organ and tissue donation, how to register in your state and heartwarming statistics about this life saving action, go to [www.organdonor.gov](http://www.organdonor.gov). If this fear continues to affect your life, schedule a visit with a mental health professional. You want to enjoy the time you have left with your parents without negative thoughts and feelings affecting the quality of time you share.

*Patricia Smith is a certified Compassion Fatigue Specialist with 20 years of training experience. As founder of the Compassion Fatigue Awareness Project© ([www.compassionfatigue.org](http://www.compassionfatigue.org)), the outreach division of Healthy Caregiving, LLC, she writes, speaks and facilitates workshops nationwide in service of those who care for others. She has authored several books including *To Weep for a Stranger: Compassion Fatigue in Caregiving*, which is available at [www.healthycaregiving.com](http://www.healthycaregiving.com) or [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com).*