

Toxic Emotions and Ways Caregivers Can Avoid Them

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Caregivers can be susceptible to a range of emotions that can negatively affect their physical and mental health. It is important to find a way to deal with these emotions so that we can try to keep the effects to a minimum.

“Mom is in mid-stage dementia and it is no longer safe for her to cook her own meals. I stop at her house to make supper before racing home to tend my own kids. I can’t continue this way but Mom needs me more now that her vision is failing. I would never be able to forgive myself if something happened and I wasn’t there.”

Guilt is one of the negative emotions that caregivers experience most frequently. Often it is difficult to avoid. If left unchecked, guilt can wreak havoc on a caregiver’s mental state. This emotion is often felt when you set your expectations too high and you are unable to achieve them. Instead of trying to be Superman/woman all the time, try to set more realistic goals so that you are not beating yourself up if you are not able to “do it all”.

“Mom and Dad need a lot more support now that they are older so I travel across town every day to check on them. My brother lives across the street from our parents but he never offers to help and when asked, always has an excuse for why he can’t pitch in. I am exhausted and this is so unfair!”

Anger, another emotion caregivers often feel, can lead to resentment towards not only your care recipient but other family members as well. You may feel that others are not helping out enough or that you are being criticized. If your insights aren’t accurate, a perceived slight can fuel the anger within you. The person towards whom you feel angry may not even be aware of your feelings, and if you don’t find a way to deal with your emotional response, you may be the one who suffers most. You may be able to

release some of this anger by venting to a close friend or by joining a support group where you can share your feelings. Some people find that writing in a journal about those things they are uncomfortable sharing with anyone else may help them put things into perspective.

“I can’t sleep because I have so much on my mind ... What will happen now that my husband is no longer able to do the yard work? How will I find the money to hire someone? How will I manage if he falls in the middle of the night? Will we be able to afford the therapy he needs? How will I cope if I’m not sleeping?”

Worry can overwhelm caregivers and lead them into loneliness. Not knowing what is ahead for you and your care recipient can be very worrying, however dwelling on the “what ifs” will only trigger more worry, creating a cycle that may be hard to break. Worry itself can be stressful, leading to sleep disturbance, overeating, and even burnout. Try to change your thoughts by breaking the cycle with meditation or re-direction, through hobbies or exercise. However, if your worry becomes too obsessive, you may need to seek counseling to help you cope.

These are just a few of the emotions caregivers can feel on a daily basis, but the important thing to remember is that they can be overcome.

Guma slàn dhut! Take care, be well!

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