

The Stages of Caregiving: Stage 2 – Recreating Your New Normal

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You didn't really have time to digest exactly how life was about to change when you first heard the news that changed everything, the news which led you to the caregiver role that has become your 'new' normal. As a caregiver, you have already been through all of the hospital stays and discharges, short rehabs, and the endless cycle of health professionals whose advice may have confused you at first. Now you are the caregiver who strives to find solutions and balance. While the reality of the condition facing your loved one settled in your mind quite quickly. It often takes much longer, months or years, before you realize how much your life has been transformed by this experience.

This stage of the caregiving journey can prove to be both the most difficult and yet the most rewarding for the caregiver. On one hand you want to care for your person; you feel it's the right thing to do, whether out of a sense of duty, love, or expectation. On the other hand, you may feel exhausted by your extra duties, your lack of social activity, or you may have had to quit your job. It may even be difficult to imagine what your future holds. The internal struggle may cause a caregiver to feel fear, anger, resentment, or apathy. Emotional instability can become the hallmark of this stage, leading to caregiver burnout. The caregiver may choose to make positive changes in his or her lifestyle and approach to caregiving.

If you are able to find a balance, it can enrich your caregiving experience and empower you to lead a much more fulfilling life at this stage.

So why do caregivers decide to commit themselves to such a precarious journey? One of the caregivers in our support groups said it eloquently; *"It is what it is! Providing care for my husband helps us both deal with this debilitating disease. I am gradually coming to terms with our situation, and helping him gives me an inner strength I didn't realize was there. I am still learning to make caregiving part of, but not all that I am. Most of all, this experience has provided me with hope for the future."*

I have noted several qualities that are typical of a caregiver during this stage;

- Caregivers are **caring** and **loving** people; which shines through during this time.
- **Protective**: many caregivers feel very strongly about protecting their loved ones.
- **Perfection**: they have a strong need to keep things the same, or adjust to make it almost the same, even as everything is changing around them.
- **Fix it attitude**: especially in the face of a progressive illness.
- **Tenacity**: they have what it takes to stick with it, and do what needs to be done.
- **Resilient**: they have the ability to bounce back from whatever happens, or doesn't happen.
- **Hopeful**: this quality keeps them motivated and in it for the long haul.

During this stage of your caregiving journey, remember to make caregiving part, but not all, of who you are. Your new normal may continue to change, and may not be what you had planned for the future, but it is yours. Embrace it!



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