

5 Ways to Keep Guilt from Stressing You Out

Adapted from <http://www.lifecarecoach.ca/articles/5-ways-to-keep-guilt-from-stressing-you-out.html>

Guilt likes to nag. When you're caring for an aging loved one, you may often hear your inner critic whispering, "You should have done that. Why didn't you?" Or "It's all your fault." If you let it, guilt can breed anxiety, stress or even depression.

But you don't have to let it. You can choose to use guilt as a helpful motivator to improve how you think and act.

Below are five common sources of guilt that our caregiving community helped us identify, along with suggestions from FamilyCaregiverStressRelief.com for how to focus your thoughts and energy in a more positive direction to help reduce guilt and stress.

1. I feel guilty for not spending more time with my aging loved one.

When Mom begs you to stay longer or to come visit more often, it can feel like a real guilt trip. Yet trying to satisfy all the demands of work, family and everything else will only stress you out.

What to focus on instead:

Try to make the time you do spend together as meaningful as possible. Check out these tips for how to get mealtime conversations going or for sharing memories with your loved one.

For the times you can't be there, consider how companionship services could help. You won't feel as guilty "abandoning" Mom if she has someone coming on a regular basis whose company she enjoys and who can provide conversation, facilitate activities, help around the house and provide transportation wherever she needs to go.

2. I feel guilty when I lose my patience.

Aging parents will try your patience at one point or another. No one's perfect. But there are more productive ways to handle impatience than to feel guilty about it.

What to focus on instead:

Patience typically wears thin when you're worn out and exhausted. If you feel like you're reaching the end of your rope, use that as a warning sign that you need a break. It's important to care for yourself so you can be your best for your loved one. Put your energy into finding time for respite rather than dwelling on feelings of guilt.

3. I feel guilty when I take time for myself.

You may feel it's your duty to devote all of your time and energy to care for your parents the way they cared for you as a child. But you can't ignore your own needs forever.

What to focus on instead:

The only way to sustain the love and care you feel your loved one deserves is to take good care of yourself as well. Check out these "Caring for Yourself While Caring for Others" resources for tips on balancing your loved one's needs with your own.

4. I feel guilty for putting my loved one in a nursing home.

Maybe you think it's not what Dad would have wanted, or you wonder if there is more you could've done to keep him at home. But there's no use dwelling on the past.

What to focus on instead:

If there's a chance Dad may recover from his current illness, start planning ahead to make the transition home possible.

If it's not feasible to move your loved one out of the nursing home, do what you can to make his time there as comfortable as possible. Visit as often as you can and make your visits meaningful (see number 1). Bring photos and decorations to personalize the room. Talk with the nursing staff to get regular updates and make suggestions if you think something can be done differently to make your loved one more comfortable.

5. I feel guilty for getting angry or frustrated.

Emotions like anger or frustration are just as natural as emotions like joy and love. You have a right to feel how you feel. It can be stressful to keep negative emotions buried inside.

What to focus on instead:

Find a safe outlet for your emotions. Join a [Caregiver Support Group](#), vent to a friend, diffuse strong feelings through exercise, punch a pillow or find a secluded place to have a good cry to better manage the emotional ups and downs of caring for an aging loved one.

*You viewed this article on the Caregivers Nova Scotia website www.CaregiversNS.org. For more information, contact us toll-free at 1.877.488.7338.