Working Caregivers Finding a Balance

INTRODUCTION

Two-thirds of caregivers in the United States work outside of the home. This creates a unique challenge for both working caregivers and their employers. Juggling caregiving and work-related responsibilities is not easy and some caregivers find it necessary to turn down job opportunities, quit their jobs, or take early retirement. Employers face the costs of replacing valuable employees. By working together, employees and employers can create a workplace environment that is productive and meets everyone's needs.

Below you will find information on how to cope with the stress and emotions related to caregiving and suggestions on how you can better balance caregiving and work responsibilities.

CAREGIVER STRESS

By developing some coping strategies, you may be able to avoid reaching the point of exhaustion and burnout. You are experiencing burnout if you become numb to your loved one's needs and feelings and you just don't care. Don't let it go that far; it may be difficult or impossible to recover.

- Remember you are not alone.
- Seek out resources that can assist you during this emotionally stressful time (books, organizations, web pages, and support groups).
- Find an Eldercare Specialist, a trained expert, who can help you find the services and support you need. Set a positive tone.

EDUCATE YOURSELF ABOUT THE DISEASE OR MEDICAL CONDITION

Whether you care for someone with heart disease, stroke or dementia or whether care takes place in your own home or at a distance, many of the daily challenges are similar.

- Learn new information and skills and learn how to adapt to the challenges you encounter.
- Get up-to-date and accurate information through books, fact sheets and brochures regarding your relative's condition.
- Contact the appropriate disease-related organization, that can guide you to other resources such as hospital-based education programs and support groups.

CAREGIVER EMOTIONS

Providing care for someone you love who is no longer able to take care of him- or herself produces a wide range of emotions. It's natural to feel sadness and grief for your loved one's losses and for the loss of your own previous life. Over time, more emotions may surface

YOU MAY HAVE DAYS WHEN YOU FEEL:

- Angry and resentful
- Guilty and impatient
- Ashamed and lonely

- Sorry for yourself
- Fearful of the future

Some of these may shock you or seem "bad." These feelings aren't self-centered or wicked. It is a normal response to the extreme changes that providing care can bring to your life.

As a caregiver, you donate a great deal of your time and energy to someone else's needs, and often ignore your own. When difficult emotions surface, remember that you have your own needs. Let your feelings prompt you to do something for yourself. Take a break: watch the birds, read a magazine, listen to a favorite song, or just meditate.

REACTION TO LOSS AND CHANGE

There are many losses as one deals with change. Recognizing these will help one address them.

- Guilt
- Sadness
- Anxiety
- Withdrawal
- Irritability
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Anger/frustration
- Feeling helpless
- Change in appetite

STEPS FOR COPING WITH LOSS

- **Talk about your feelings:**
  Reach out to others (friends, family, spiritual leaders) – this will help reduce feelings of isolation.

- **Join a support group:**
  Support groups provide caregivers with the opportunity to share with other caregivers and learn from one another.

- **Write your feelings down:**
  For people who enjoy writing, this can be a wonderful way to express feelings.

- **Read a book on coping with grief:**
  There are several books available on the issues of caregiving, grieving and loss.

- **Get help when needed:**
  Professionals are available and a third party analyzing the situation can be a reliable ally. The Internet is another resource for finding help nationally and in your community.
  The U.S. Administration on Aging's Eldercare
  Locator http://www.eldercare.gov/ or (1-800-677-1116) can connect you to services in your community.

WORKING AND CAREGIVING: FINDING THE BALANCE

- **Prioritize your time** at home and at work. Keeping a calendar of activities helps to identify priorities.

- **Learn to delegate**. Share your responsibilities with others. Do not be afraid to ask for help. It is not a sign of weakness.

- **Help your company** recognize your needs and the needs of other employed caregivers.

- **Keep communication channels open** with your supervisor or your Human Resource department.

- **Utilize your company's available resources**. Remember that businesses want and need to keep good workers. They want to provide support for their employees.
- **Use your vacation time** and make sure the time is spent nurturing you.
- **Make time for you**. Do what works for you. Spend time with friends, family members, or participate in a group. Spend time alone. Plant a garden, go for long walks, read, take a hot aroma therapy bath. Do whatever it takes to nurture yourself. Always include doing things that are important to you.

Information provided in this fact sheet was adapted from materials submitted by St. Andrew's Caring Workplace, St. Louis, MO. For more information visit their website at http://www.caringworkplace.com

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