

The Value of Letting Go

As a family caregiver you might simply be overwhelmed with yet one more “should do” or suggestion. My intention in this handout is to offer you another perspective, one of being more psychologically resilient while caregiving. As a psychotherapist I work with many individuals who are struggling to have a more pleasant, more meaningful, and more secure life. When you are caring for another as best you can, there are several pitfalls that you might encounter.

One is being very aware of other people’s opinions and suggestions. From time to time you might want to hear other people’s views. However when they are unsolicited they can be quite overwhelming. It is as if you are constantly being barraged by telemarketing phone calls!

Recommendation #1: Let go of what other people think.

How to do this: Encourage yourself to only ask people when you want their help.

What this looks like: When people offer a suggestion, give them permission to “do” it.

Possible results: You will feel more in control and more steady. They will be flabbergasted.

Another pitfall is attempting to be perfect. Now intellectually you might know that this is an impossible feat, however, accepting being imperfect can be very difficult. Somehow in this culture, being good enough is not a concept that is rewarded.

Recommendation #2: Let go of being perfect.

How to do this: Invite yourself to be compassionate with yourself.

What this looks like: Begin treating yourself as you would your best friend.

Possible results: You will feel more humble and realize that you are not a superhero; they will begin to accept that you are unwilling to be a “doormat”.

In this culture, there are several attitudes that are honoured that definitely trouble family caregivers. They are the need to be in control; to look exhausted and overwhelmed; to be anxious. Read on to learn how letting go can help you become more psychologically healthy as a family caregiver.

Recommendation #3: Let go of being in control.

How to do this: Invite yourself to imagine that you have been “schmucked by a bus”! Even if you are not here, life continues for the person you have been caring for. As a family caregiver this is so important for you and everyone else to grasp.

What this looks like: Chuckle (may be hard here though ever so appropriate).

Possible results: Some people around you will feel distressed and will pressure you to continue as you have been, while others will be happy to see you taking care of yourself. You will find this oh so difficult at first and then a huge relief.

Recommendation #4: Let go of exhaustion.

How to do this: Stop doing what you are doing when you are tired!

What this looks like: You will multi-task less; your life will slow down; you will take more time do things.

Possible results: You will feel better physically and emotionally. You will be happier. You will have better relationships with everybody. Others will be in awe.

Recommendation #5: Let go of being anxious (as a way of life!)

How to do this: Being aware of your anxiety and taking a deep belly breath often.

What this looks like: You will be frequently calming yourself down by interrupting your stress response (your thoughts). On the outside, it is not visible. On the inside, it is hard work being aware.

Possible results: Your physical body will be healthier. You will discover that anxiety is no longer useful for you! (Anxiety is useful for life/death emergencies as it helps you act quickly through the release of adrenaline.) Others will feel relief. You will feel calmer.

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