

Common Feelings of a Caregiver

Here are some feelings you may find yourself experiencing as a caregiver.

Denial

The first emotion you may feel as a caregiver might be denial. It is common to hear at some point in your life that, "You are in denial."

More than likely you heard this expression in terms of denial of a fact. In life when we do not like a situation, experience or we find our lives are in direct conflict with how we thought our life would be, it is human nature that one may deny their feelings.

Denying feelings can be caused by traditions, values, morals or the way you were raised. If you find yourself denying feelings about a specific situation you can reflect deeper into the reason you may be in denial with the assistance of a professional. Trained professional can help you find the reason you are in denial and the best way you can move forward in life.

Being in denial is considered to be a defense mechanism and something humans often do to protect themselves from unpleasant situations or conflicts.

As a caregiver you may find yourself denying the following:

- The health condition of your loved one
- Your ability to care for your loved one
- Your true feelings about being a caregiver
- Your feelings toward other family members who are not helping with the care of the loved one
- What being a caregiver is doing to your health

Fear/Anxiety

As a caregiver, you may find yourself fearing or being anxious about many things; all the responsibilities you now are faced with, medical issues with your loved one, the unknown future and even whether or not you can be the type of care giver you want for your loved one. It is normal to feel afraid or to be anxious about being a caregiver. There are many unknowns that have suddenly been placed into your life. If you find yourself not being able to cope with your feelings of fear or anxiety, and they are interfering with your life, it is advisable that you seek medical advice from a professional.

Symptoms of fear:

- Headaches
- Tension in muscles
- Stomach and intestinal disruption
- Being overly tired
- Inability to sleep

- Restlessness
- Heart palpitations
- Feeling dizzy
- Sweating
- Exhaustion
- Inability to focus or concentrate
- Having trouble problem solving
- Not being able to do normal daily tasks
- Body shaking

Anger

Being a caregiver to your loved one can be a difficult and demanding role. Often you are not a trained professional, rather just a family member who has been placed in this role suddenly and unexpectedly. You may have had to leave your employment situation, you may no longer be able to enjoy activities outside of your home and your time can now be so limited that you and your close friends may not be able to spend as much time together as you previously did.

All of these situations can cause feelings of anger to emerge for a caregiver. While anger is one of the most normal feelings for caregivers, it can also be the hardest for caregivers to experience.

Anger can be expressed toward a loved one, toward other family members and toward others. Situations can cause anger to suddenly arise and without justification. When this occurs, the caregiver can become conflicted. Often feelings of anger are irrational and not warranted but nonetheless very real for a caregiver. Some caregivers feel trapped, isolated and alone. Others feel empowered, entrusted and well loved. Everyone is an individual and your feelings will be different based on your given situation.

For caregivers who do not properly express feelings of anger, issues can arise. It is advisable to seek medical treatment from a physician, therapist or counselor if you think you are not properly dealing with your anger. As a caregiver if you ever find yourself thinking about or acting out on feelings of doing harm to your loved one, it is mandatory that you reach out for help. Call a hot line, a local crisis center, your family physician, your local Scleroderma Foundation Michigan Chapter or even 911. You are never alone, and you should never feel that way, seek help before it gets to the point where your anger controls you.

Remember, feelings of anger do not go away, so if you are simply burying them and denying them, in time they will surface. They will come up in other aspects of your life through resentment, guilt and even depression. This can affect your sleep patterns, eating habits, and in turn your health.

See resource on ***“Ways to avoid anger”*** on the website

Resentment

We are living in a world that is filled with so many obligations, work, family, employment, hobbies, social media, entertainment and even hobbies can be demanding on our time. Now you are a caregiver trying to struggle with finding the time to care for a loved one, and handle all of the other roles and responsibilities in your life. What the heck is a person to do?

Resentment comes into play easily and without notice as a caregiver struggles to find the right balance with care giving needs, professional needs and personal needs. Caregivers can feel like they are walking a tight rope every day, balancing between what they have to do and what they want to do. Time is just moving too quickly and the day suddenly does not hold enough hours to manage to get everything done.

The result can often be feelings of resentment. This is very normal and understanding given the situation. Juggling so many commitments can force these feelings to surface and if you are someone who has never felt this way before, it can be difficult to manage those feelings.

Caregivers may start to resent their loved ones, other family members who are able to continue to live their lives untouched by the illness or disease that affects your loved one or others around you that are encouraging you to remain optimistic.

Resentment can sometimes feel like feelings of anger or even guilt. If you have not experienced these feelings before you may be unsure why you are even feeling the way you are and you may try to dismiss your feelings as unimportant.

The best approach to take is to understand your feelings, accept them as being normal and try to manage them. If you find yourself acting out on them in unacceptable ways, seek the counselor and care of a licensed therapist or your physician. Seeking treatment is not a sign of weakness, rather a sign of strength and the desire to do the best for yourself and for your loved one.

Guilt

Feelings of guilt can often accompany being a caregiver. One day you wake up feeling positive about your role, and the next you feel less than happy about taking your loved one to the doctor as opposed to heading off to the gym for your favorite work out.

You may begin to feel resentment because you can no longer spend your free time doing what you enjoy and you are now caring for someone else's needs verses your own. As those feelings start to linger, suddenly in comes the GUILT!

Just when you thought you were doing so well with handling the resentment, now you are feeling guilty about even that! Your emotions begin to feel as if you are on a roller coaster ride at your favorite amusement park. The only problem is, you want off, and you want to get off NOW!

See resource on ***“Ways to manage your guilt”*** on the website

Grief

As a caregiver you can experience grief at various times, the beginning of your new role, during your time as a caregiver to your loved one, or after the death of your loved one. Since caregiving is a demanding role, along with those demands will come many emotions.

In the beginning of your role as a caregiver, you may grieve the loss of your previous life, the freedoms you have lost or even the control over your life that you had prior to becoming a caregiver. Suddenly you are making the decisions for someone else and there is little time left for you to do the things you enjoyed in life. It is normal to experience grief and loss of these elements of your life.

As a caregiver you may be going along with a routine and then suddenly experience grief when you least expected it. This is also very normal and can be caused by the realization that your loved one's health condition is worsening, may not ever get better or you perceive your role is unending and this fact frightens you. To grieve all of this loss is normal and understandable.

Upon the death of your loved one, you may find yourself left with grief; questioning whether you did a good enough job as a caregiver. You may wonder if there was more you could have done for your loved one or if the care you provided was what your loved one truly needed and was adequate.

These feelings of grief for caregivers will come and if appropriately dealt with will leave just as quickly as they appeared.

See resource for tips on ***“Tips on managing your feelings of grief”*** on the website.

Acceptance

Acceptance, what an amazing word that is but for many caregivers who have just taken on the role and all the responsibilities that come with the position, it can be like climbing up a very large mountain to get to this point. Caregivers must travel through so many other emotions that often once they come to acceptance, they are not sure they are even there!

Acceptance can be a peaceful place or somewhere you have arrived at because you are too tired to fight all the other emotions and you simply want to find comfort. However you have found your way to this emotion, welcome!

Acceptance means you have learned to weather the other emotions, you are finding balance and you are ready to tackle the obstacles ahead of you. It does not mean you like all of this, it just means you are doing your very best to cope. Be proud of yourself, pat yourself on the back, look yourself in the mirror every morning and remind yourself just how incredible you are. Someone needs to, and why shouldn't it be you?