Alzheimer’s Caregiver Burnout

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Caregiver Burnout

Having a loved one begin to exhibit signs of Alzheimer’s can be a frightening situation. You know that the coming weeks and months are going to test your limits and push you passed them. You are feeling the pressure, pressure from others to take on the majority of the care giving and pressure from yourself to live up to expectations.

Over time, this pressure becomes chronic stress. Chronic stress becomes burnout. In periods of burnout, the caregiver will feel disillusioned, detached, disgruntled and having diminished ability to care for their loved one. The caregiver will aim irritability and frustration at everyone in their life, including the person with Alzheimer’s.

Do you think that since you have been a caregiver for a number of years that you are not at risk for burnout? Keep in mind that burnout occurs when the symptoms present after a short amount of time but “rustout” arises more slowly and over a longer period. Rustout is typically more difficult to manage, as the problems have been more persistent.

Become Fireproof

There is no coming back from burnout or rustout. The only solution is prevention. Here are some tips:

- **Be realistic**. Having expectations based in reality will save you valuable resources. Can you really work a fulltime job, take care of your kids and care for your ailing loved one simultaneously? Probably not. Expecting yourself to will only breed disappointment and inadequacy. Create a list of what tasks you will be responsible for completing. Revise this list often and avoid being too rigid. Realistic expectations will change with new information.
- **Be practical**. What are the risks with your loved one? What are your fears? If you are concerned about him wondering from the home, consider some type of door alarms or home security. If you are worried about safety within the home, find ways to make the environment less dangerous by removing unneeded cleaning chemicals and modifying the stove. Reducing the risk in the home will lessen the stress and distraction you experience away from your loved one.

- **Be selfish**. Finding time for yourself and ways to recharge in your downtime is crucial. Many make the mistake of thinking that best way to relax is staring at the TV from the couch. This is more of a neutral experience when positive experiences exist. Go places with people you enjoy. Eat a good meal. Get a massage. Find some way to bring humor and laughter into your life. Things have probably been too serious lately.
- **Be a team**. Providing any level of care for someone with Alzheimer’s is an “around the clock” job. Doing it alone fuels the fire of burnout. Accept help and assistance whenever offered. If none has been offered, use your best assertive communication to ask others in your life. If you continue to be denied, it may be time for professional help. This is not giving up; rather, it is a commitment to provide best level of care

available.

Conclusion

Acceptance of your caregiver role does not mean you resign yourself to unhappiness. Work hard to find and maintain balance. Consistently reevaluate your plan and modify. Caregiver burnout and rustout are real risks and you and your loved ones deserve you to be at your best.