



CAREGIVING: *Adjusting to your new role*

For most people, change is not easy. This may be especially apparent in the changing roles experienced by caregivers and those for whom they provide care. The role of caregiver can bring with it a variety of tasks and responsibilities that require both you and your aging family member to make adjustments. You may be a full- or part-

time caregiver providing hands-on care, a long-distance caregiver, or one who is watching over the care of a loved one in a nursing home or assisted living facility. The caregiver or care receiver relationship will continue to change as your loved one's care needs increase and more demands are placed on you.

Your aging family member is also adjusting to many changes. The loss of freedom, the transition from an active life to one of confinement, and the relinquishment of decision making power can lead to feelings of worthlessness, anger, and sadness. Aging persons are forced to accept help as their abilities begin to decline. Becoming dependent on others can be a frustrating.

The new roles you and your family member will be taking on will likely offer a new set of challenges and a variety of emotions. From the caregiver perspective, more will be expected from you and that can cause stress, guilt, depression, anger, and resentment. Your loved one may offer some resistance and may be feeling personal shame, worthlessness, and resentment toward you as the caregiver.

Don't despair! Caregiving can also bring with it feelings of accomplishment and the knowledge that you are helping your loved one. Care receivers may feel gratitude toward their caregivers and are often relieved that they are no longer burdened with many of the chores required in daily living.

Most caregivers enter into the caregiving experience unprepared to deal with the feelings associated with these responsibilities. Watching the decline of your once active parent can be difficult. Perhaps you and your parent never had a good relationship, and now he or she must rely on you to provide daily assistance. There may also be competing demands between these new caregiving responsibilities and the needs of your own family and work.

ADJUSTING TO CHANGES

- Keep a positive attitude.
- Get family members involved so responsibilities can be shared.
- Try to anticipate and prepare for changes that may be coming.
- Maintain open communication with the care receiver, and if possible, keep him or her involved in decision-making processes.
- Remember, your loved one is probably experiencing the same intense emotions as you are.
- Seek professional help from your Employee Assistance Program (EAP), financial advisors, counselors, or an elder care specialist.
- Attend a support group, and encourage your loved one to do the same.
- Make yourself knowledgeable about the aging process and any disease-related information.
- Concentrate on the strengths of the care receiver, and help him or her remain as independent as possible.

The emotional and physical demands involved with caregiving can strain even the most resilient person. That's why it's so important to take advantage of the many resources and tools available to help you provide care for your loved one. Remember, if you don't take care of yourself, you won't be able to care for anyone else.