

giving thanks

for being a caregiver

You must think about ways you can offset the demands on you and try to take some time for you and for your family.

Much of the adjustment that goes into being a caregiver for your aging parent goes into dealing with the stress and the emotional drain that role can bring.

In addition to the issues of how to care for her in the best possible way, there are the emotions of anger when programs don't work right or when the facility she is in has problems. There is resentment at other siblings or even at your aging parent because of the demands this job has on you personally.

There are other adjustments that are a huge drain on you emotionally.

Balancing work, home, and private life with the demands on your time being a caregiver is a juggling act that will involve as many “dropped balls” as successes before you ever get it right.

And about the time you do get a good balance, the demands of your elderly parent might change, and you are again pulled back into that stressful situation.



giving thanks



I knew it would work if I kept trying.

But there is one emotion you may wish to foster and dwell on as much as you can to offset the worry, the anxiety, the anger, and the resentment. That is the emotion of thankfulness.

Now it may seem impossible to even ponder how thankfulness could become part of your emotional reaction to this demanding situation you find yourself in.

But if you can find ways to be thankful that you are the caregiver for your parent, that positive emotion can do wonders to drive out those negative emotions in your heart. And when you think about it, there are quite a few great things you can be thankful for **BECAUSE** you are the primary caregiver for your aging parent.

Some of those are...

- You can give back a bit of the sacrifices they made to raise you. You can say, “Thank you for raising me and never giving up on me. And now I am not going to give up on you.”
- There would be anxiety if you were not there. By being close, you can get the facts quickly and get them right.
- You always know what’s going on. They need someone that can say, “It’s alright. It’s under control” to them. That someone is you.



giving thanks

You are needed and you are important to your elderly mom or dad. If ever there was a time when you felt needed not just every so often but every day and every hour of the day, it is when you are there to help your parents through this tough time of their lives.

Celebrate those little times of laughter and joy. Celebrate when you enjoy a movie together or laugh at those “insider” family jokes that always bring a smile. Those times will be precious to you when your parent dies.

And even after your parent dies, you will be able to look back on those months when you gave all you could to make those final months of her life happy and peaceful and you will be able to say, “I did the right thing.”

And that is one feeling that is irreplaceable and something you will be able to be thankful for forever.



does grandpa like himself?



Few of us think about our own self esteem. But how we feel about ourselves, our work, our relationship to family and the community and our place in the world is the cornerstone not only of your ability to function and be productive in life but of your mental and physical health as well. That is a basic concept of human psychology for everyone and that need for self esteem doesn't go away when you become a senior citizen.

When you think about it, this episode of being a caregiver for your aging parent is not your first crack at caregiving. You were the caregiver and to some extent still are for your children as they were growing up. You took care of their every need including their emotional and psychological needs. And any good parent learns early on that a child's self esteem is vital to their success in school and in life.

Now you are in that relationship with your mom and dad and while you are not "raising them", you have taken on the caregiver role which means in addition to worrying about their finances, their physical health, their diet and their living arrangements, their mental health and self esteem are things for you to consider as well.

does grandpa like himself?



A grandfather is someone with silver in his hair & gold in his heart.

Because it's not us going through it, it's hard for us to empathize with the huge changes going on in the life of your aging mom and dad and the massive impact those changes have on their self esteem. For a parent, your sense of self worth comes from your independence, your ability to take care of your kids, do your job and be useful to others in society. In the senior years all of that disappears in what seems like an instant. In the eyes of the senior, they go from being the hero to their kids to being a pitiful old man or woman being taken care of like they were the child.

Their feeling of being useful vanishes and is replaced by a feeling of being unnecessary and a nuisance. The “things” that they invested themselves in that are symbols of their success which includes their house, their ability to drive and their work all go away in rapid succession one after the other. Small wonder senior citizens undergo a tremendous drop of self esteem. And when you go from thinking highly of yourself to not liking who you are at all, that is a formula for disaster.

does grandpa like himself?



It's a dangerous mental condition to stay in because without self esteem, the natural response is to turn to unhealthy thoughts of alcohol or drug abuse or in the most extreme cases, suicide.

As a caregiver, be aware of the self esteem of your aging parent and the huge impact moving out of their home and losing their spouse and ability to drive is having on them. The symptoms of poor self esteem is your parent doesn't take care of himself like he used to, repeats stories over and over because those stories remind him of a time when he liked himself and seem to launch on desperate adventures to try things he really should not take on just to get a feeling of being someone again.

You can do a lot to build that self esteem back up in your aging parent. Help him get in touch with family and old friends. Encourage him to talk about the old times and pour praise on him about those days. And above all, let him have lots of time with the grandkids. Those little angels could love anyone into liking themselves. So let them use a little of that magic on Granddad so he can like himself again as well.





listening to your parents

-- even now

Have you ever had that aggravation that you go over to your aging parents' apartment or house to help with the housework and get some serious "care giving" done and the senior himself seems to be bent on stopping your progress? You no doubt came over with a list of things to do at the apartment to help your parent live a clean and healthier life by getting the place into shape.

You know that part of your job as caregiver is to take care of chores and do the things your aging parent cannot do any more or just doesn't do because of fatigue or general lack of attention to detail. So, when your parent wants you to forget all that work and just sit and talk, what is aggravating to you may be very important to your parent, maybe even more important than the apartment getting cleaned up.





No matter how old a girl gets, she never stops needing her mom.

listening to your parents

-- even now

It's good for you to think about your role as caregiver because you really are not just called to be a maid, chauffeur and cook. Anybody could do those things. The reason you are perfect for the caregiving role is you are close to the heart of your aging parent, and you are the one that will understand when she talks about things she is thinking or feeling that day.

So don't downplay the value of just being a companion to your parent during your visits. The emotional and family support you provide to your parent is central to his self esteem and feeling of who he is in the world. He will be storing up dozens of little anecdotes and stories to share with you when you come over. So, to let him get all of that sharing "out of his system", it's important for you to be a good listener.



listening to your parents

A good listener doesn't just let the other person talk and say "uh huh" every so often. If you are just tolerating your parent as she shares little things with you, that will become apparent and be worse than if you didn't talk to her at all. The best way to fit your fellowship and relationship time around work time is to start out each visit with some time together just to talk.



Perhaps you might make it a habit that every time you come over, you and your parent will sit down and just talk for about a half hour over coffee, a snack or tea. That is when you can focus all your attention on what mom or dad have to say. Listen with focus and attention so when something is funny, you laugh, and you can ask questions and explore the concept or situation being discussed in some depth.



Be patient, elderly people repeat themselves and often dwell in memories. The memories are opportunities for you to capture their stories, ask questions you always wondered about and keep a journal.



listening to your parents

Then at an appropriate time, you can say, “Gee Mom, I would like to tidy up those dishes. Can you sit at the table, and we can keep talking while I do that?” That is a nice easy transition to starting your work and keeping the lines of communication open. And you can continue to let your mom or dad “follow you around” as you do chores chattering away the whole time.



Don’t censor the topics or insist that what you talk about are only the important things. You should know from talking to your kids that you must be ready to talk about the trivial things in their lives to prime the pump of communication about the hard issues and ones that will take some mature understanding to deal with. So be patient and open with your aging mom and dad and once they know you have good listening ears, they will open about important things going on in their lives. And that is when your listening skills will really pay off.

