

## The Emotional Journey of Caregiving

The caregiving journey can be emotional for the caregiver and the person receiving care. There are many rewards and joys of caregiving, such as:

- having a new relationship with the person receiving care
- giving back to someone who cared for you
- enjoying a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction from doing a job well
- developing new skills, knowledge (ex: advocacy abilities)
- increasing compassion and personal growth
- making friends through support groups
- building greater self-esteem
- creating memories
- experiencing less grief for what used to be
- finding joy in the present

Along with the positive, life-affirming feelings, it is common to have upsetting thoughts and emotions that challenge your effectiveness as a caregiver.

Recognizing that you are not alone in experiencing these powerful emotions can be helpful.

Feeling guilty can be normal, but do not let it get the best of you.

Almost every caregiver occasionally experiences feelings of guilt, including guilt over not doing enough or choices made. Do not let guilt overwhelm you. This includes not feeling guilty when you take time for yourself.

Proper self-care will help you cope with the stresses of being a caregiver.

Getting help can reduce feelings of guilt, so make the most of your support network.

Feeling angry and frustrated is natural. Feelings of anger and frustration are common among caregivers. You may be angry about the way your relationship with the care receiver is changing, or your new role as a caregiver. Many caregivers feel frustrated at their inability to meet all the needs of the individual or to balance their caring roles and their own personal lives. Some feel angry about the physical/mental changes the care receiver is experiencing. It is normal to feel upset about these changes, but keep in mind that we all experience physical changes as we age.

Some people experience mental changes. Some changes are reversible, others are not.

Regular medical checkups improve the success rate for reversible changes.

Taking out your frustration on others only adds to your feelings of guilt and loss of control. It also creates tension between you and others. If you find yourself snapping at the person you are caring for, then stop and take a break.

Do something positive for yourself to relieve the tension. You can ask for help from your support network or from a trained professional.

Feelings of depression can be normal; help is available. The losses suffered by the care receiver, family, and caregivers themselves can often lead to depression. It is important to take regular breaks and pursue interests you enjoy outside of the caregiving role. Build a support network and take advantage of community or professional counselling services. All will help you manage your caregiving responsibilities. If you are sad or depressed, talk to someone you trust (ex: friend, family member, neighbor) about how you are feeling.