Who cares for the caregiver?

The simple answer is that we, first and foremost, have a responsibility to our loved ones to care for ourselves. In this issue of Centered, the official newsletter for the Family Caregivers Center of Mercy, we look at the idea of resentment that may grow when we overextend ourselves in our caregiver roles. We also examine the importance of recognizing our own feelings when realizing how much of your love, care, and commitment is gone. Nearly half of Alzheimer’s caregivers report feelings of depression and eighty percent report high levels of stress. Let’s be sure to remember to care for ourselves, for as we take on more of our loved ones’ former responsibilities, we must recall that one of those was caring for us back.

Thoughts on Resentment

Resentment is a clue that you may be giving more than you have to give. It can be a sign that you do not have enough energy to continue to offer your care receiver what you have been offering. Feeling resentful can be a signal that you need to get some help to care for your loved one. Once you realize these types of feelings and are willing to take some action, it is sometimes easier to think of a small change you can make. For example, if you feel resentful that you never have any time alone in your home, it may be time to ask a neighbor, friend, relative, or hired caregiver to take the person for who you are caring out for coffee. The Family Caregivers Center is ready to assist you with making small changes to lessen any potential resentment you may be feeling.
Transitioning Out of Caregiving

When the person you have been caring for over a long period of time dies, you as a caregiver have ‘lost’ your loved one and also your role as a caregiver. This can be overwhelming.

The Family Caregivers Center of Mercy has designed a four-part series followed by a monthly support group for long-term caregivers transitioning out of their caregiving role. The sessions focus on the spiritual, financial, and emotional aspects of moving out of caregiving as well as tools for filling the void. It is entitled Life After the Long Goodbye.

Participants in the inaugural group held in July 2016 say:

“The Family Caregiver Center has been an integral part of my healing after the death of my beloved husband of 42 years. The transitioning group and follow-up sessions have helped me adjust to my changed life.”

“After my husband died I was having trouble adjusting to not being a caregiver. When I was invited to join the group I thought it might help. I have made new friends in a confidential, non-judgmental setting. After the initial four weeks I wanted to continue because it was important to continue the journey together. What a blessing it has been.”

The next session will be offered beginning Tuesday, January 10 and meeting each Tuesday through January 31, always from 2 to 3:30 p.m. There is no cost. Please register online, call (319) 221-8866 or email mrink@familycaregiverscenter.org.

January Book of the Month!

Jolene Brackey wowed family caregivers when she spoke with them in Cedar Rapids at the Caregiver Wellness Day held at the Kirkwood Hotel in November.

She wowed them because her suggestions for how to manage the behavior of, and interact with, individuals living with dementia were so practical and common sense that it made everyone think “I should have thought of that!”

Likewise her book, Creating Moments of Joy, offers the same spot-on ideas. For example, Jolene suggests that if the person living with dementia does not recognize you as a son or daughter, that you bring a photo of yourself at a younger age when you come to visit. She further suggests that you kneel down when you talk so that you appear smaller, and that you call your parent by their first name and say something like, “John, I found this picture of your son, Ryan. He loves to play baseball too.”

Jolene explains, “Who better to give back memories of Ryan to his dad than Ryan?” And suggests, “Who knows, Ryan might hear stories about himself he has never heard and his dad might even say, ‘I love that Ryan.’”

Several copies of Jolene’s book are available for checkout at the Family Caregivers Center Resource Library.

Our quote of the month comes from psychologist William James:

“The greatest discovery of the 20th Century is that our attitude of mind determines our quality of life, not circumstances.”

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