When A Loved One Lives In A Long-Term Care Home

Family Councils Ontario

Understanding and Managing Caregiver Stress

You Are Still a Caregiver

When a loved one moves into long-term care, your role as a caregiver changes, but it does not disappear. You may still be involved in supporting their well-being by attending appointments and care conferences, advocating for their needs, visiting regularly, and helping with important decisions. This transition can bring many emotions, including stress, sadness, worry, guilt, or uncertainty. These feelings are common and are a natural part of adjusting to a new phase in your caregiving journey.

Remember: Moving your loved one into a LTC does not mean you have stopped caring for them.

Why Can This Be Stressful?

Family members may experience stress because of:

- Worry about whether their loved one is receiving good care
- Feeling guilty about the decision to move them into care
- Missing the relationship and routines they had before
- Adjusting to changes in their role as a caregiver
- Concerns about falls, illness, medications, or changes in health
- Difficulty communicating with staff or navigating the healthcare system
- Feeling responsible for advocating for everything
- Financial concerns
- Changes in family relationships or responsibilities
- Feeling helpless when they cannot "fix" the situation
- Grieving changes in their loved one's abilities, personality, or independence

Common Feelings

GUILTY "I should be doing more."
SAD "Things aren't the way they used to be."
RELIEVED "They are safer."
WORRIED "Are they okay when I'm not there?"
ANGRY OR FRUSTRATED "Why is this so difficult?"
LONELY "No one understands what this is like."

All of these feelings can occur at the same time, and there is no right or wrong way to feel. Feeling relief simply means you recognize that your family member is receiving the care and support they need.

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Ways To Reduce Stress

1. Redefine Your Role

- You do not have to provide all the hands-on care yourself.
- Your role can include being a visitor, advocate, companion, decision-maker, and source of emotional support.

2. Let the Care Team Care

- It is okay to trust that trained staff are providing day-to-day care.
- Ask questions when you have concerns, but remember that you do not have to monitor everything.

3. Make Visits Meaningful—Not Perfect

- You may but you do not have to visit every day or stay for hours.
- A short visit, a favourite song, looking through photographs, sharing a snack, or simply sitting together can be meaningful.

4. Stay Connected With Staff

- Learn who to contact when you have questions or concerns.
- Keep communication respectful and clear.
- Ask about care conferences or family meetings when appropriate.

5. Give Yourself Permission to Have a Life

- Continue to work, socialize, exercise, enjoy hobbies, and spend time with others..
- **Taking care of yourself is not abandoning your loved one. You cannot pour from an empty cup, and looking after yourself is an important part of the caregiving journey.**

6. Share the Responsibility

- If possible, involve siblings, relatives, friends, or other trusted people. Divide visits, calls, errands, and other responsibilities.

7. Talk About Your Feelings

- A trusted friend, counsellor, healthcare professional, spiritual care provider, Family Council, or caregiver support group can provide a safe place to talk.

To learn more about Family Councils, contact Family Councils Ontario (FCO):

www.fco.ngo info@fco.ngo toll-free: 877-622-9968

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When Guilt Shows Up

When feelings of guilt arise, try replacing these thoughts with:

Instead of: "I should be there more."
Try: "I am doing what I can, and my loved one is receiving care from a team."

Instead of: "I failed them by moving them into long-term care."
Remember: "I made a difficult decision based on their needs, well-being, and safety."

Instead of: "I have to make everything better."
Try: "I can support my loved one without being able to control everything."

A Reminder For Family Caregivers

Your loved one may now have professional caregivers, **but you still have an important place in their life.** Your presence, voice, stories, affection and advocacy remain meaningful.

You are allowed to:

- Tale a day off from visiting
- Ask for help
- Enjoy your own life
- Feel sad
- Feel relieved
- Set boundaries
- Trust the care team
- Have good days
- Laugh and enjoy yourself without feeling guilty

Remember: Your loved one would want you to care for yourself as well. They would want you to have moments of peace, happiness, laughter, and connection. Taking care of yourself is not a sign that you care less. It is a reflection of the strength, love, and dedication you continue to bring to your caregiving journey.

TAKE CARE OF THE CAREGIVER, TOO

You don't have to stop caring for yourself in order to continue caring about your loved one.

CONNECT - COMMINICATE - REST - VISIT - BREATHE - ASK FOR HELP

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