



## Family Caregivers of British Columbia

### Reducing Your Feelings of Guilt

One of the most common emotions that family caregivers experience is guilt. Caregivers can feel guilty about:

- Not doing enough for the person they are caring for or not doing it well enough.
- Feeling angry, resentful or frustrated about their situation
- Taking time off for themselves
- Not spending enough time with the person they are providing care to
- Not having enough time for other family members (children, spouse)
- Living in another town and not being there when they are needed
- Bringing in outside help to assist them with caregiving
- Their family member moving into a care facility because they can no longer be safely cared for at home.

I've found that even the most effective caregiver can find something to feel guilty about. However, guilt drains time, energy and emotion - all three of which are already at a premium for family caregivers.

Guilt arises when there is a gap between the way we are and what we perceive as how we should be. We spend our time berating ourselves for what we perceive as failure instead of focusing on the caring and compassion that we have brought to our family member's situation. When we focus our energy on thinking about how things "should" be, we are not looking for solutions to the situation as it actually is.

Sometimes I think guilt allows us to feel like we are being "good" while doing something that we judge as wrong or not appropriate. Or perhaps our guilt comes from feeling helpless because we can't do anything about our family member's illness or disability.

Guilt camouflages other feelings so it is helpful to look beneath the guilt. Ask yourself, "Where are my guilty feelings coming from?" and "What are these feelings telling me?" Once we recognize the feelings underlying our guilt, we can see our situation from another perspective and address it directly as needed.

Guilt is fostered by unrealistic expectations of what we are capable of doing, as well as what we imagine we should be doing. It is important to remind ourselves that we are

doing the best we can at the time with what we know. Given the tools we had to work with, we used our best judgment, and made caregiving decisions that we truly felt were in the best interest of all concerned.

Sometimes the guilt you are feeling comes as a result of another person's comments or actions. However, someone else cannot make us feel guilty if we are not already feeling that way internally. Their comment pushes a button that we installed ourselves – so it highlights what we are already feeling. If we change our internal perceptions and expectations, and accept that we are doing our best – then they cannot trigger our guilt.

Moving beyond guilt to acceptance and self-forgiveness will make us more relaxed and confident caregivers. Guilt seldom achieves any positive outcomes. When we take time to care for ourselves it better benefits the person we are caring for because we will feel more relaxed and less irritated.

*By: Barbara Small, Program Development Coordinator, Family Caregivers' Network*