

When you feel unsupported by your family (and what to do about it)

When caregiving arises, so can unresolved family difficulties. The family dynamics might be competition issues, denial issues, differing philosophies, or (fill in the blank). They can provide no end of stress. Perhaps these difficulties are from long ago or maybe they are new. Recognizing this can be very useful.

So I ask you, how old do you feel when a difference arises? If you feel as if you are a child and the pattern is oh so familiar, I suggest to you that probably now is not the best time to resolve the issue. Why? Well, if you have been unable to resolve it successfully so far, now that you are under much more stress with caregiving, you are going to probably be even less successful! If on the other hand you and your family members choose to focus on helping the person in need and not on your differences, you might be very successful. By the way, if this latter is the case, I will guess that you are feeling like an adult rather than a child. Congratulations!

Caregiving can take a huge amount of energy and is much better handled by adults rather than children.

Sometimes, clarifying what you are prepared to offer as a caregiver can be very helpful. Of course, as time progresses, so does your unique situation so your caregiving might need to adapt as well. Knowing this allows a family to be flexible and supportive while caregiving.

If there is dissension amongst family members, or even their spouses, please know that everyone has the right to their own feelings and thoughts and behaviours. What you might discover though is that you are really feeling uncomfortable with the differences. Grudges and resentments can arise quite easily.

Your ability to simply notice your own feelings will help enormously. In this way, you can pull yourself out of squandering your energy. If you do not want to be around them, that is your choice. However, if you believe that you must be around them, pull yourself forward compassionately and remind yourself to focus on your own behaviour in caring and not on the other person's.

One frequent difference that arises is people's varying levels of involvement. People remain themselves throughout their lives. Sometimes, you might discover much to your dismay and irritation that another family member is not who you thought they were. It is very hard when this occurs.

Another irritation is how someone decides on power of attorney or medical representation issues. Your parent or spouse might have made a choice that you think is wrong. Well you are permitted to have your reaction, however, your

parent or spouse had the right to choose whom they did. If you want to dispute it you will need to take them to court.

As a caregiver, feelings can run very high and you might find yourself feeling powerless. So is there hope for any ease? There can be if people are willing to “let go” and focus only on how they themselves are caregiving. There can be if people are able to “accept” (not necessarily like) another’s differences. There can be if you choose your “battles” rather than trying to win at all costs all the time. Lastly, there can be if you remember why you are choosing to caregive.

Caregiving is an art, not a competition and living well and with kindness, no matter what life has given you, is an achievable goal.

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