

## The Reluctant Caregiver: Are You One?

If this is you, you are not alone. It describes all caregivers at one point or another. Many of us become the primary caregiver by virtue of distance, availability, obligation or what seems a lack of other options. We often may feel that we have no choice but to provide care and to make certain sacrifices in our own life. When we think we don't have choices, we can feel frustrated, resentful, or trapped.

And it can become extremely stressful when you notice that you are experiencing these negative feelings (anger, resentment, frustration) more often than not. Before going any further, I want you to know that your feelings are valid no matter what they are. You matter, as do your feelings. And only you can decide to shift these feelings.

So what to do? Acceptance of your reality is very helpful. Though you might not like it, I encourage you to simply notice all your thoughts and feelings as well as your behaviours.

Now the clincher: no one else is making you think the way you are thinking, feel the way you are feeling nor behave in the way that you are behaving. This concept might sound familiar to you or it might not. If it does, I invite you to once again consider what all this means to you.

If it is new information, I encourage you to imagine each person as being a separate entity enclosed within their own skin. Everyone is unique and we do not have the ability or power to get inside another person's skin. This also means that we do not have access to their thoughts, their intentions, or their feelings and vice versa. You cannot make another person feel or behave a certain way nor can they make you feel or behave a certain way.

Once you start becoming more aware of your own behaviours as being yours, ask yourself if you like yourself. Quite often you can get to the point of doing things more harshly and more sarcastically when you are a reluctant caregiver. This can be hard on the other person and devastating to your own well-being.

A huge clue to improving your well-being is that in order to shift your feelings, you shift your behaviours. Note what you are doing when you are feeling better and begin to do more of that or note what you are doing when you are feeling resentful and do less of that. Though you can make radical shifts, even small ones can transform your resentment or frustration or distress.

How is it that you are currently caregiving this person? Think about this because it is important as there are many assumptions that might be pulling you away from the reality that you are choosing to caregive for whatever reason(s). Moving out of this powerless position of being a victim is essential to your well-being.

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