



Family Caregivers of British Columbia

Coping with Those Unexpected Changes

“The expected is just the beginning. The unexpected is what changes your life.” Shonda Rymes.

Although we know it might one day happen, few people plan in advance to be a family caregiver. We seldom know how or when a family member’s health will change and our responsibilities as a caregiver will begin.

With this unexpected change come unexpected feelings (grief, anger, frustration, anxiety), unexpected responsibilities (providing personal care for your spouse, taking over financial decisions for your parent) and unanticipated repercussions on other areas of your life (quitting your job to provide care, a family member moving into your home). We really never know what lies ahead, what challenge may be waiting for us just around the next corner.

Though we can’t control these changes when they happen, we do have control over how we respond to them and the actions we take toward coping with the change in an effective way. Below are some suggestions to help you cope with suddenly finding yourself in the role of family caregiver.

Breathe: Remembering to breathe is the first thing to do when the unpredictable happens. Taking a few deep breaths allows you to relax, get perspective and determine what needs to be done.

Prioritize: Write down the things you need to do right away and what can wait. Break down jobs into manageable pieces that can be easily addressed one by one.

Take action: By tackling the most pressing issues first, you take the first step toward dealing with your new situation in an efficient manner.

Ask for help: Don’t be afraid to ask for assistance from other family members, friends, health professionals or community agencies.

You don’t need to reinvent the wheel: There are lots of resources available through your support network and community. Many other people have been, or currently are, in similar situations and can offer you suggestions on what to do and where to find the help you need.

What meaning are you putting on this change? It is often not the actual change that causes us difficulty, but rather the meaning or judgment we put on it. This explains why some people sail through changes, while others struggle. Does this change mean that

you won't be able to go on that vacation you had been planning for so long? Does it start you thinking about your own health and who will care for you when your time comes? Does it seem like just one more thing in your already busy schedule? Acknowledging these thoughts and recognizing the feelings associated with them can help reduce their impact.

Successfully managing change requires giving up the familiar and comfortable, and moving on to the unfamiliar and unpredictable. To successfully manage unexpected changes we must put forth effort, acquire new skills, grieve what we are leaving behind, and be willing to live with some chaos and unpredictability for awhile. And even though this change may feel initially overwhelming, keep in mind that we have all had years of moving through various changes and coming out the other side.

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