



Family Caregivers of British Columbia

Increasing Your Resiliency

I am passionate about the concept of increasing resiliency. Why? This life is to be experienced well, not simply endured. As a family caregiver you can expect to have many demands placed on you: by yourself, by your family, by the medical system, by your friends, by your neighbours, and even by those who populate your dreams.

There are 3 concepts which are helpful to increase your resiliency:

- being proactive;
- shifting out of crisis-management; and
- doing at least the basics to satisfy physical, psychological, and spiritual health.

When you are being reactive, you need to keep on your toes; it helps to be hyper-vigilant and never relaxed. Some feelings that are commonly experienced are: guilt, worry, resentment, frustration and anger. You need to continually be learning new strategies. You experience exhaustion. Perhaps I have painted too black a picture for you. I simply want to remind you that people and bureaucracies love it when you demonstrate your willingness to “do”. When this happens more will be given to you to “do”. As a family caregiver, you will discover that that the “to do list” is never-ending.

Being **proactive** however reminds you that you are choosing to be a family caregiver. As such, you are seeing it as being of value. Keep this focus in mind. Learning which events require your presence and which can be delegated is a sign that you are being proactive. This delegation allows you to share the burden of chores and decisions with others; it allows you to be a part of the community.

Though everyone does things differently, being proactive reminds you that you are not alone and others have skills and attitudes which complement you. Being proactive allows you more time to think, deliberate, and process all that is coming up for you and the issues can be profound. Choosing to be a caregiver or not reflects your personal philosophy as well as your personal circumstances and is only part of your life. In other words, your life expands to include your choice. If it is taking over your life, you are acting more from a reactive stance.

Recognizing when to shift from an acute focus to a chronic focus is also essential for caregiver resiliency. You can determine this yourself. Simply noticing the frequency of problems encountered and recovery ability can be applied both to you and the person for whom you are caring. I encourage you to more quickly **shift to long-term strategies** to increase your resiliency rather than relying on quick fixes. Your adrenalin runs out as does your ability to withstand stress. Burn-out is a result of living in crisis-management. I do not recommend you increase your tolerance to stress but to lower your tolerance.

Physical resiliency helps enormously. So, the basics are: eating well, taking nutritional supplements when needed, drinking lots of water, sleeping well, exercising, Receiving and giving heart-felt touch is an essential physical human need.

Psychological resiliency helps enormously. So, the basics are: respecting boundaries; being present-focused; healing from past issues; having a non-judgmental attitude; being kind and being surrounded by those who are kind; treating yourself as you would your best friend; recognizing which issues are important and letting go of the others; having integrity; keeping in contact with others who are not problem focused while having alone time as well. Heart-felt touch benefits psychological health too.

Spiritual resiliency helps enormously. So, the basic is remembering we are all connected and that none of us is alone. Whether in an organized religion or not, spiritual health offers people many intangible benefits of community.

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