



ACCEPTING HELP IS ESSENTIAL FOR FAMILY CAREGIVERS

The responsibilities of caregiving can often feel overwhelming and seem more than you can handle by yourself. More and more of your time and energy is used up navigating the healthcare system, finding resources or figuring out how to meet someone else's personal and medical needs. It is natural to feel overwhelmed and stressed. You don't have to do everything alone. In fact it is essential that you ask for help and support from the very beginning so that you don't burnout.

Asking for help is essential to the well-being of both the family caregiver and the person receiving care. When you share the responsibility, you will have more time and energy for a normal relationship with your family member and to take care of yourself as well. You are less likely to be angry and resentful. The care recipient's experience will also be enriched by having the opportunity to interact with more people.

Despite the fact that family caregivers may be overwhelmed with responsibility, they often do not ask for help or reject help when it is offered. Asking for help can be difficult when we don't know what we need, we don't want to be a bother, or we feel guilty that we can't do it all ourselves. Beliefs such as "no one can do this as well as I can" can also be an obstacle to asking for help. It's true. No one will do it exactly the same as you, but that does not mean that they cannot be helpful in their own way.

Recognize that asking for help is a sign of strength, not weakness. It means you are acknowledging the challenges of the situation and are being proactive in resolving problems and preventing stress. It is a sign of strength because it requires putting your pride aside and acting in the best interest of your family member and yourself.

You first need to admit that having some help will make a real difference to the care recipient's quality of life, and therefore yours as well. You need to identify what help you need. Which tasks would be the easiest to ask others to do? Which do you really want to do yourself? And which, if any, can you afford to pay others to do?

Discuss your needs with family members and friends who might be willing to help. They may want to contribute but don't know how. Create a list of tasks you need help with. Then focus on each individual's strength. Some people may be better at personal care while others may be better able to help around the house or run errands.

Contact your local health authority to see what services are available to assist you, such as home support and respite. There are many businesses, community and volunteer agencies that offer services to reduce your load. People may not realize you need help if you don't ask for it. Remember, you have the right to ask for help. Everyone will benefit from sharing in the caregiving.

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