



## **THE EMOTIONAL IMPACT OF CAREGIVING**

Family caregivers experience a wide range of emotions in response to the responsibilities of providing care, including anger, grief, guilt, and resentment. And yes, there is some joy and satisfaction as well.

All these feelings are normal and will fluctuate continuously dependent on the current situation. It is important to find a way to express and manage these emotions, especially those that drain your energy. Left unexpressed these emotions can lead to caregiver burnout.

All your emotions are valid and real. Trust them as they come up. Take a deep breath and examine what is motivating the emotion and what small change you could make to shift that feeling. Difficult emotions can be a signal to you that the current situation is not working for you or that something needs to change. Then at those times when you feel happy and energized, notice what has caused this response so you can draw on it in the future when you need to.

Below are some suggestions to help you manage tough emotions:

- Attend a caregiver support group at the Family Caregivers' Network (FCNS) or through one of the many disease-specific organizations, such as the Alzheimer's Resource Centre, MS Society or the BC Cancer Agency.
- Talk to a friend, a fellow caregiver, a co-worker or professional counsellor. Many community organizations, including FCNS, provide telephone support.
- Find time for activities that energize you and that you enjoy. Taking time to recharge will make you a better caregiver overall and help toward reducing any anger and resentment. Everyone will benefit.
- Look at the expectations you have for yourself, the person you are caring for and the current situation. Are your expectations realistic or are you setting yourself up for further frustration and guilt? Are you trying to maintain life as it was before any changes in health?
- When you feel angry or resentful, take a break and leave the situation if possible. A quick walk or some deep breathing can quickly help defuse your feelings.
- You may feel guilty when you are experiencing "negative" emotions such as anger and resentment, or when you take time for yourself. It is important to remember that you are doing the best you can, at the time, with what you know.

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