



WHEN ASKING FOR HELP IS HARD

Asking for help is often hard because we don't know what our needs are, we are fearful of being a bother, or we want to protect children and other family members from the gravity of the situation. Other barriers include such beliefs as thinking "No one can do this as well as I can," or feeling "No one should do this but me."

Family and friends may want to help but don't always know how or when to intervene. They may want to help but don't want to commit a lot of time or to be as intensely involved as some caregiving tasks would require. Give them choices as to which tasks would be most helpful to you and require only short-term commitment. Be sure you are not shutting out persons who would help.

Begin by listing your needs and determining the best resource for them. Some common needs of caregivers include:

- Concrete help (regular and dependable) with caregiving tasks. Seek necessary help from both formal and informal sources available to you. Make a point, for example, of knowing what services are available in your community and what the eligibility criteria are. A family member or friend could collect this information for you. Make a permanent list of all the tasks that need to be done, i.e., mowing the lawn, shopping, providing transportation, etc. Some may be more appropriately performed by formal agencies in the community.
- Someone who will listen non-judgmentally and who will not give unsolicited advice. List friends and others with whom you feel comfortable. Use these persons for support.
- Respite: time to renew the spirit and restore the physical body.
- Time to grieve and feel the sadness of caring for a loved one with increasing and irretrievable losses.
- Time to laugh (a sense of humour is essential to maintaining a perspective in coping with the constant demands of a devastating illness). Special friends who can take you away from the immediate tasks of caregiving are invaluable.
- Time to be self-indulgent or to be pampered by others on occasion. Small pleasures or rituals regularly contribute to the well being of the caregiver. It doesn't matter what the activity is as long as it brings pleasure and respite and it is regular.
- Good information is essential to understanding and coping with your loved one's illness. Caregiving tasks and coping are made easier when caregivers understand that many of the unpredictable personality changes and behaviour problems usually are due to the disease process and not to willful behaviour on the part of the patient.
- A safe place to ventilate. Mutual support and discussion groups can be helpful. Others with similar experiences best understand your situation and can offer good, time tested tips and techniques for coping and caregiving.
- Appropriate resources from the local community to assist with legal, financial, social, and long-term health care planning.