

THE EMOTIONAL SIDE OF CAREGIVING



Family Caregivers
of British Columbia

— Let us help —

PARALLEL PATHS: THE CHANGES EXPERIENCED IN THE CAREGIVING RELATIONSHIP.

by Elizabeth Bishop, author of the Conscious Service Approach
and companion book *Conscious Service*.

Becoming a caregiver is often motivated by deep love and affection. But it can also feel like an obligation or duty. Sometimes, it's a mixed bag of emotions swinging from one end of the spectrum to the other.

Some caregivers are instantly aware of the precious gifts in caregiving, while others may never find those treasures. Most experience loss and grief in the journey. While caregivers process all the changes, so too do those on the receiving end. Even while the experiences are unique to each, the journey in many ways is shared.



LITTLE CHANGES ADD UP.

There is nothing like caregiving for someone with extraordinary needs to bring us face to face with loss -- both the current reality and the anticipation of it. Knowing that someone is near the end of their lives can make this time quite poignant and potentially very challenging. Caring for someone who may still live a long time, but who might be at high risk for complications or early death, can create a kind of hyper-alert response in the caregiver.

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Caregivers often witness loss of function in those they care for. This truth can cause fear and resistance that may include denial of the situation. Sometimes “this is not happening” mantras can be soothing for a while – until it isn’t. Then the caregiver is called to accept a particular reality that may add to their caregiving in ways they aren’t prepared for. Ways that impact their own daily functioning.

Accepting something does not mean we need to like it. We can accept what is happening and honour our discontent. When we can’t do things the way we have always done them, we have an opportunity to hone our problem-solving skills and get creative in the pursuit of a solution.



CHANGING INDEPENDENCE AND FREEDOM

Caregivers often struggle as they witness alterations of independence in their family member or friend brought on by changes in function. Erring on the side of caution, it is easy to rush to protect. We can become very focused on physical safety and health at the expense of a holistic quality of life.

When we lose our independence and freedom, our quality of life can quickly deteriorate. Without connection to self, inspiration, self-efficacy, and autonomy, loss of hope and joy all but disappear. Joy is a facet of well-being that can be easily overlooked when the focus is on survival.

At the same time, caregivers are also taking a hit to their freedom. Gone are the days of long weekend road trips off the grid. Dream vacations are postponed, career paths interrupted, and never mind the shift in daily life to accommodate more people, and unanticipated events. It can feel like life has been stolen out from under you. The fact that you don’t like it only leads to guilt.

We are invited now to discover a deeper meaning of freedom in our lives, to explore where new choice points exist, and to decide how we will respond now, both internally and externally. There is an opportunity here to deepen our capacity to have faith in what is unseen and tap into intuitive knowing on levels not previously experienced.

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CHANGING RELATIONSHIPS

As care needs increase, relationship dynamics change. Role reversals, intimacy interruption, and increased focus on care details at the expense of other forms of connection have potentially devastating implications. At times, it can feel as though the former person is no longer and everyone involved is finding new footing in a relationship with an intimate stranger. You've shared lives together, but now everything is different.

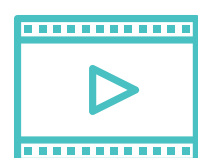


Letting go of the previous versions of identity for both self and other, as well as your shared story, is no easy task. Be gentle with yourself and the process. Grieving the past and letting it go opens the space for renewal of relationships. When everything is changing, we can access the gift of the unknown with a heart seeped in fear or one filled with hope. Forging ahead with curiosity might unearth a treasure you never knew existed.

FURTHER RESOURCES:



Visit the [Caregiver Learning Centre: Read](#) for more articles.



View some of our webinars and videos in [the Watch section](#).



[Listen to a podcast](#) to learn more about self-care and well-being.

Call our Free Caregiver Support Line

1-877-520-3267

Monday, Wednesday & Friday | 8:30 am - 4:00 pm PST

Tuesday & Thursday | 8:30 am - 7:00 pm PST

Join our Free Virtual Support Groups

Caregivers Connect: BC's Virtual Support Group

2nd and 4th Thursday of every month | 2:00 - 3:30 PM PST

BC Men's Virtual Support Group

2nd Tuesday of every month | 7:00 - 8:30 PM PST



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