

Avoiding Holiday Caregiver Stress

“It’s too soon! I can’t believe that the holidays are coming up so soon. There’s so much work to do already. I am too exhausted to even think about the holidays and all the work that will mean for me. Can’t I just skip it this year?”

Does that sound familiar to you? As the holidays approach, caregiver stress escalates due to changes in routine, changes in expectations from the caregiver and the care recipient, sadness thinking about past holiday pleasures, and anxiety about what difficulties the holidays will bring.

Caregivers can relieve their stress level by considering some of the caregiver educational opportunities available in November, which has been declared “Caregiver Appreciation” month. One of the ways to relieve caregiver stress is to become educated on the multitude of resources that are available to help caregivers. Services such as adult day care, in-home respite, homemaker, home health aid, transportation, Medicare/Medicaid Assistance Program, and medical equipment and medical monitoring devices that can provide for needs of the care recipient.

The Caregiver Resource Network (CRN) and the Grand Rapids Public Library have teamed up to present two caregiver events in November. On Wednesday, November 5, 2008 from 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. there will be a “Celebrating Caregivers” event at the downtown Grand Rapids Public Library located at 111 Library Street NE, Grand Rapids. This will be an informative and enjoyable evening as Karen Libman, GVSU Theater Professor, explores the challenges of balancing work, family, and caregiving. It will also feature more than 30 booths with education and resources for caregivers and hors d’oeuvres will be served. Pre-registration is required for this event. To reserve your spot email the Area Agency on Aging of Western Michigan at registration@aaawm.org. The second caregiver event will be held at the downtown Grand Rapids Public Library on Saturday, November 22 from 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. This is a free open house where caregivers of all ages are invited to hear expert presentations and learn about available caregiver resources. It is not necessary to pre-register for the November 22nd event.

Here are some additional tips to help make this coming holiday season pleasurable for yourself and the ones you care for.

1. Let other family members know how they can be helpful; try not to assume they know what you need.
2. Make lists for what needs to be done and delegate responsibilities, either to family members, friends, or hired services. Consider using respite services if necessary, such as Adult Day Care Centers.
3. Keep expectations low; don’t overload yourself with unnecessary activities. Give yourself permission to do less than you have done in the past.
4. Start new traditions which better fit into the current circumstances such as go and visit others rather than entertaining many guests at home.

5. Provide your loved one with a quiet room where they can go if the holiday confusion becomes overwhelming.
6. Try to include the care recipient in some of the holiday preparations. Find activities which will enhance their feelings of usefulness and offer successes.
7. Try to monitor the amount of sweets which are consumed by the care recipient. Many people with dementia cannot tell when they've had too much to eat.
8. Take care of yourself. Plan on providing yourself with relaxation strategies such as taking a break from caregiving responsibilities, listening to calming music, scheduling massages, visiting with friends, etc.
9. Avoid caffeine and alcohol, as self medication for "bad days or nights."
10. Accept your feelings. A sense of sadness, anger, loss, frustration, and disappointment are common at this time. Talk to someone with whom you can share your feelings.

Excerpts from this article were taken from "Anticipating the Holidays" by Hanni Epp, MA, West Michigan Caregivers Alliance and "Minimizing Holiday Caregiver Stress" by Cathy Brady, LMSW, Pine Rest Christian Mental Health Services. This article was provided as a public service of the Caregiver Resource Network (CRN). More caregiver articles can be found on the CRN website at www.caregiverresource.net. The Caregiver Resource network is a collaboration of West Michigan organizations dedicated to providing for the needs and welfare of family and professional caregivers within the community. Funded by the Area Agency on Aging of Western Michigan with Older American's Act Title III-E, Family Caregiver Support funds. For more information consult our website at www.caregiverresource.net.