

Top Ten Spiritual Practices for Caregivers

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Care giving can be a very rewarding experience, as we want to give our love and support to a family member or friend. It can also drain our energy when we are called to give a lot of our time, especially if also working or caring for children at home. It is important to find time and ways to be renewed in health, energy and peace of mind. Maintaining an active spiritual life is one way to find much needed renewal and strength while being a caregiver to a loved-one. Here are some suggestions for ways to develop or maintain spiritual strength:

1. You're Not in This Alone: Seek Support: There are many support groups available through the community and churches. Talking with other caregivers can help to share needs and concerns. Just knowing that you are not alone and that others understand. A support group will also help you to see or affirm your gifts as a caregiver.
2. Stay Connected to your Faith Community: It can be a temptation to neglect your own spiritual needs when caring for another. Let your congregation and/or clergy know your needs and concerns. A faith community can provide great support. The person you are caring for also may need to have pastoral visits to give them spiritual support.
3. Be open to healing power of love in your relationship with a loved one. There may be unresolved issues from the past that can cause guilt or resentment that can affect your ability to provide loving care. It is important to work through these issues and know that healing and reconciliation are possible in the relationship.
4. Embrace Acceptance and Forgiveness: As human beings, we all have the tendency to be hurtful in our relationships. When we become caregivers to a loved one the relationship can become stressed and it is easy to become hurt or angry. Try to start and end each day with an attitude of acceptance and forgiveness of hurts or misunderstandings.
5. Remember That You and Your Loved One are Children of the creator: When hurts and resentments surface in the midst of care giving, it will help to remember that you and your loved one are a blessed and loving creation. Seeing your loved one and yourself as beloved children can open up new paths of loving, understanding and caring.
6. Express Your Feelings Honestly: We want to be positive and caring people so it is often difficult to openly express feelings such as resentment, anger or even admitting exhaustion. Keeping these feelings to yourself will cause them to fester within us. Talk with a trusted friend, a clergy person, and a counselor. Use prayer, meditation or journaling to give these feelings up. Talking about them can take away their power over you.

7. Find the Balance Between “Doing” and “Being”: Caregivers often fall into the mode of doing. You spend much time balancing work life, family life and caring for a loved one in need. Life can become a series of tasks to accomplish. Ask yourself if your self-worth comes from doing for others or from being in a spiritual place.
8. Give Up Control: A way many of us deal with stress is to work to have control of our lives. We need to remember that we are not the ones in control. Realizing that there are spiritual powers greater than ourselves in control, we can let go and find peace.
9. Maintain Times of Rest: We cannot be at work 24/7. Our bodies and spirits need rest and renewal. Some faith groups understand this as Sabbath. Each person may have a different understanding of Sabbath. For some it is corporate worship, for others time alone in nature or being with family and friends. It may be a time of meditation or journaling. Whatever your understanding is of the need for rest and spiritual renewal, honor it. Give yourself the gift of rest and renewal as often as you need it.
10. Take Time for Prayer: Taking time for prayer each day, gives us ways to practice “being”, to give up control, to express honest feelings, to find rest and renewal, to experience forgiveness and renewal. Whether prayer for you is private and meditative, formal ritual, or in the form of journaling, prayer puts you in a place where you are not alone. You will find strength in this journey of care giving will be blessed, as you are a blessing to others.

Reference: (Caring for Aging Parents: Richard Johnson; Concordia Publishing, 1995.)

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