

Caring for Others who Are Caregiving

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We look around and see friends or family members who are providing care for others in their lives. We see they need support, but it may be hard for us to know how to support them, and in return, we are unresponsive to their need. We don't hear them ask for help, but yet we see them overwhelmed and exhausted.

Why is it hard for caregivers to ask for help? When looking at their lives and circumstances they may feel helpless. They can't fix their situation or don't know where to turn, so they freeze.

Possibly, they feel shame. Many of us have been raised to believe that illness and struggle are not issues we discuss outside our immediate family circle. We expect that we will always be able to take care of our family members. Our expectations cause us to feel shame when our loved one's illness and need for care overwhelms us.

There are many other reasons, including exhaustion, embarrassment, lack of time, or limited resources which cause caregivers to isolate. As a concerned family member or friend of a person who is providing care for someone, how can you come alongside them?

1. **Invite the caregiver to join you on one of your daily activities.** Invite them out of their home, to prevent them from becoming isolated, whether it is for a walk, a yoga class or a trip to the mall. You may notice that this is just what the caregiver needs. He or she may need a time to reduce the loneliness they feel or an opportunity to talk.
2. **Become a good listener.** As you become more involved in the life of the caregiver, he or she will appreciate the chance to be heard. "Being heard is so close to being loved that for the average person, they are almost indistinguishable." David Ausburger Listening carefully is a way to show support and to build trust. It is part of being a caring friend and provides satisfaction for both the listener and the friend.
3. **Use your skills.** If there is something you are good at or like to do, such as cooking, shopping, driving or making telephone calls, offer to do a specific task for the caregiver. Here are a couple of examples: offer to prepare a meal weekly (or as often as you feel comfortable); or offer to drive the care receiver to physical therapy appointments. Come

alongside the caregiver and offer to do a tangible task. Everybody is a winner with this approach. You get to do something you enjoy, the caregiver gets a break, and the care receiver gets a change of pace with someone new who cares about them.

4. **Help them find community resources:** Through the Caregiver Resource Network, we realize that caregiving can be both rewarding and challenging. Sometimes people are thrown into the role of caregiver with no training, and often, no support. The Caregiver Resource Network offers monthly classes to focus on a variety of topics. It also provides a safe place where caregivers can feel supported and heard.

The next Family Caregiver University Class will be held on February 26, 2016. Our topic is *Depression vs. Winter Blues: Understanding and Treating Depression for Seniors and Caregivers*. We will spend time learning how to determine if the person you are caring for is dealing with depression or the winter blues. Depression in older adults is common, but that doesn't mean it needs to be a part of normal life. This class will focus on options for seniors and caregivers who are dealing with depression. The class will be led by Dr. Suzann Ogland-Hand. She is a geropsychologist who currently works in her own private practice. She specializes in depression treatment and works with seniors, care providers and their families.

For a full list of Family Caregiver University classes provided by the Caregiver Resource Network, please call 1-888-456-5664 or see the website at www.caregiverresource.net.

Caregiver's Corner is provided as a public service of the **Caregiver Resource Network**. 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.