



Caregiver Stress in Eldercare: Comfort & Resources

by award-winning author / stress-relief expert Susie Mantell

"She is a friend of mind. The pieces I am, she gathers them and gives them back to me in all the right order."
-Toni Morrison

Support & Comfort for Caregivers

Caregiver Stress is a phenomenon only truly understood by those who have lived it. I guess there are no coincidences in the kind of work I do. Having cared for two immediate family members through the premature ends of each of their lives, presently, I am in my tenth year of care for a third loved one whom I adore, but who is no longer the entire person I knew before. So -- I get it. Perhaps, like you, I understand first-hand the devotion and worry and exhaustion one chooses in taking on long-term care-giving, and I hope that whatever prompted you to read this article, you find some comfort here.

These days, I have many clients who are balancing the profound needs of aging parents with concerns of their own regarding the effects of aging, and in a culture that so honors youth. Often, these people are also still caring for children, hence the nickname "The Sandwich Generation."

As we care for our aging parents, we can choose to focus on the profound loss and the ache of sadness, or we can cherish this "bonus" time we've been given with our aging parents and learn everything we can from them, even in their decline during this precious remaining time.

Some Days...

This is a stage of life when we need to sit quietly some days and feel the feelings. We need to cry. It's terribly sad. But it's also a time to laugh together warmly at small moments, to focus on this present. This is a time for sharing a sweet memory or a cool breeze, warm sunlight, old photos, the first crocus of spring.

Music, Music, Music...

Many fill their days with the music of Gershwin and Cole Porter and scores of Broadway shows with parents who used to hold our small hand as we thrilled to opening curtains of Carousel, The King and I, and My Fair Lady. Take your parents back there with those songs and the movies of those times.

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If you care for someone with Alzheimer's, Lewy Body, vascular or another form of dementia or age-related disease, it is my heartfelt hope that you will find some help here. It is excruciating to slog through researching where to go and how to advocate for the parent who once soothed your own bad dreams, dried your tears... and yes, "pushed your buttons. " Now, they cannot fasten their own.

There may be no words for the heart-breaking, bone-wearying stress of caring for a loved one who is being erased from the inside, one memory at a time. They are synthesized down to the most primal essence of self. If someone you know is retreating into the cave of care-giving, it is a desperately isolating place. Reach inside, and take them to a movie.

Two Questions Every Caregiver Needs to Hear:

1. How can I help?
2. Do you want to talk about it?

Ask. Ask again. Listen.

Caring for aging loved ones isn't always easy. In fact, it is sometimes the hardest job we will ever do. But it is a sacred trust. It is an honor to ensure an aging loved one's safety and happiness, their comfort and dignity at this time in life.

More Resources:

Award-Winning Stress-Relief <http://www.relaxintuit.com>

Alzheimer's Steals More Than Memory

<http://www.nytimes.com/2004/11/02/health/02alz.html>

Alzheimer's Association: Research & support for patients, families, caregivers.

<http://www.alz.org>

Dementia Highlights: Offering support, resources.

<http://www.psychiatry24x7.com/homes/dementia.jhtml>

The National Institute on Aging: Alzheimer's Education & Referral Center

<http://www.nia.nih.gov/alzheimers>

Visiting Nurses Association of America: Provides extensive home-care nationwide.

<http://www.vnaa.org>

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Meals on Wheels: Nationwide delivery to those in need.

<http://www.mowaa.org>

AARP: Extraordinary resource for seniors & families. Excellent publications, insurance, member discounts.

<http://www.aarp.org>

The Lighthouse: Leading resource worldwide on vision impairment and vision rehabilitation, education, research and advocacy.

<http://www.lighthouse.org>

God's Love We Deliver: (NY,NJ) Supports men, women, children living with HIV/AIDS and other serious illnesses. <http://www.godslovewedeliver.org>

Book: "Learning to Speak Alzheimer's" by Joanne Koenig Coste. A remarkably practical, compassionate guide. I seldom recommend a book this highly, but if you care for someone with dementia, get this book.

Book: "The 36-Hour Day" by Nancy L. Mace and Peter V. Rabins. 36 hours refers to caregiver's days. Readable, informative, comforting, well-indexed.

DVD: "The Forgetting: A Portrait of Alzheimer's." Poignant, insightful, based on David Shenk's best-selling book.

BONUS: I came across an extraordinary mini-video that touched me deeply. So grab some tissues, and enjoy this beautiful, powerful message: <http://parentswish.com/site01/big.html>

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