



FAMILY CAREGIVER NEWSLETTER
APRIL 2012

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THE POWERFUL CAREGIVER

This column is named after the class "Powerful Tools for Caregivers", a six-session workshop on helping caregiving families thrive (not just survive). It is offered in Racine County several times a year

Guilty! - Fact or Feeling?

You feel uneasy - as though you've swallowed a creature that has growing tentacles reaching out in all directions - your stomach, your gut, your chest, back, neck and head. You have a nagging headache, tension in your shoulders, pain in your back, flutters in your stomach, and a feeling that you've done something wrong... or that you haven't done enough ... or that you should be able to make everything OK for the person you care for. You eat too much or too little, can't sleep or sleep too much, feel disappointed in yourself and angry with others. Sometimes you just feel like a failure. "What is wrong with me?" you ask yourself. "I'm letting everybody down."

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Well, the person you've let down the most is probably you! You have an image of the "ideal you" - the way you believe you should be and the way you would like to be. This image is based on your values and beliefs of how things ought to be in a perfect world. When your actions differ from what the "ideal you" would have done, you feel guilty.

Let's look more closely at this "ideal you". Let's name her, oh, say "Ida" for a moment! Ida has unending patience, but after answering the same question ten times in five minutes, you raise your voice in irritation. Ida makes sure her spouse is always perfectly happy, but you had lunch with a friend last week, while your husband ate alone. Ida would have her father live with her, but your dad lives in Assisted Living because your job and family duties make it impossible for him to live in your home. So...you feel guilty!

You may feel extreme sadness for things Ida would have expected you to fix. Some of us convince ourselves that we could have prevented our loved one's disease. We say to ourselves, "I must make sure she never feels sad or lonely or upset in any way. I must make up for the fact that life has thrown her this misfortune." What a huge and impossible assignment!

It's important to distinguish between guilt and guilt feelings. Guilt is a result of doing something deliberately to hurt another person. It calls making amends and asking forgiveness. Guilt feelings arise as a result of thoughts and chemicals in the nervous system. They usually have little or no basis in present reality. They may arise as a response to something that reminds us of the past. They may be a reaction to seeing a "perfect" scenario portrayed on TV and knowing that we can't live up to it. They may be wishes that we'd done something differently.

Guilt feelings can and do make us sick. They can also be magnified by illness, lack of sleep, isolation, and feeling overwhelmed. (Yes, this is a vicious circle!) Unchecked, guilt feelings start us

down the road of self-destruction. They can be downright poisonous. How, then, can we “detox” the health and well-being we need for good caregiving? No one gets rid of guilt feelings once and for all. It’s an ongoing human process. However, we can learn to transform those feelings into useful thoughts and actions.

First, we need to identify them – the earlier the better. What is a guilt feeling like for you? How does it feel in your head? Your heart? Your gut? Does it “eat at you”? Does it show its face suddenly just when you thought you were having a good day? Does a guilty thought speak in the voice of your parent or another influential adult from early in life? Does it make you cry? Does it make you irritable? Observe yourself patiently (and try not to feel guilty for your guilty feelings – a snare we often set for ourselves!)

Here are a few more suggestions:

- Talk to someone – A friend, fellow caregiver, clergyperson, counselor
- Write – a journal, a letter, a poem. Make a Wish List of things you wish you had in your power (“I wish I could cure his illness.” “I wish I’d told her more often that I love her.” “I wish I could be a 24-hour-a-day caregiver 24 hours a day and still healthy.)
- Breathe – Take slow, even, deep and full breaths. Inhale love for yourself and others and exhale guilty thoughts and feelings.
- Exercise – as much as you can. Exercise releases endorphins, chemicals that promote a feeling of well-being and of being good. They will help you see what you are doing well and forgive yourself for not being Ida!
- Eat healthfully and drink lots of water. Simple actions with big results!
- Have some fun every day! Look for opportunities to laugh! Watch children at play or the antics of a pet. Keep a funny movie handy for when your mind needs some comic relief.
- Ask for help Your guilt feeling may be caused by not being able to do everything you think needs to be done. So transform that feeling by getting some help! If there are barriers to taking that action, talk to a Caregiver Support Specialist.

The book Daily Comforts for Caregivers by Pat Samples, has this to say about guilt feelings:

“Guilt can swamp me if I let it. It’s easy to forget that I am making the best choices I can in my current circumstances. They are good enough. I am good enough. If I see ways to make changes for the better, I’ll do that. But starting today, I’m going to drop the burden of guilt over any “shoulds” or “coulds.” I’m going to let myself off the hook. Feelings of guilt may still surface, but when that happens, I can gently remind myself that I’m doing things differently now and that my best is good enough.

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*The criteria you used to invent Ida is probably unreasonable now. Life changes things. What you once thought was a “must” may now be impossible. So send Ida packing – back to the ideal and imaginary world she sprang from. Shake off the guilt feelings, be kind and generous with yourself, and live fully in the world you inhabit now, with all its imperfections. Take good care of yourself as you care for others.*

***You’re doing your best, and your best is good enough!***

## **Community Resources**

*This column highlights some of the many resources in our community. For more, see the Community Resource Directory available from the Aging and Disability Resource Center (638-6800 or [www.adrc.racineco.com](http://www.adrc.racineco.com))*

Daily Comforts for Caregivers by Pat Samples, (Fairview Press, Minneapolis, MN, 1999) has 365 short readings for caregivers. A limited number of copies are available by calling 262-833-8764.

A few books from our Caregiver Library that address caregiver guilt feelings: -

Love, Honor, and Value, by SuzanneGeffen Mintz (the founder of Nat'l Family Caregivers Assn.)

Passages in Caregiving by Gail Sheehy

How to Care for Aging Parents by Virginia Morris

To borrow a book, call 262-833-8764.

Support Groups for Family Caregivers - Other caregivers can be the very best people to talk with!

Many organizations have excellent websites for caregivers. Here are a few:

Family Caregiver Alliance [www.caregiver.org](http://www.caregiver.org)

National Family Caregivers Association, [www.thefamilycaregiver.org](http://www.thefamilycaregiver.org)

Alzheimer's Association – [www.alz.org](http://www.alz.org)

Lewy Body Dementia Association [www.lbda.org](http://www.lbda.org) Browse the web for many more sources of support.

## **SUPPORT GROUPS FOR FAMILY CAREGIVERS**

**First THURSDAY 10:30AM-12Noon \*\*THIS GROUP FORMERLY MET ON FRIDAYS.**

**Alzheimer's Association Group – APR. 5**

**For Families Dealing with Alzheimer's and other Dementias**

Lincoln Lutheran Office Building, 2000 Domanik Drive, 4<sup>th</sup> Floor

**Second Tuesday 1:30-3:00 pm**

**APR. 10**

Yorkville United Methodist Church

17645 Old Yorkville Rd. (3 Miles West of I-94, Just N. of Highway 20)

**Second Saturday 10:30AM-12N**

**APR. 14**

Mount Pleasant Lutheran Church, 1700 S. Green Bay Road

**Third Wednesday 1:30-3:00 PM**

**APR. 18**

Burlington Senior Center, Eppers Room, 209 N. Main Street

Continued...

**Third Thursday 6:00-7:30 PM**

**Alzheimer's Association Group **APR. 19****

**For Families Dealing with Alzheimer's and other Dementias**

Mount Pleasant Lutheran Church, 1700 S. Green Bay Road

**1700 S. Green Bay Road**

**COMING SOON: A support group by teleconference. Call 262-833-8764 for more information.**

## **OTHER EVENTS FOR CAREGIVING FAMILIES**

### *Powerful Tools for Caregivers*

This class series is designed to help you the caregiver take care of yourself while caring for your relative or friend. You will develop tools to reduce personal stress, communicate your needs effectively, deal with difficult emotions, and make tough caregiving decisions.

**Tuesdays April 17-May 22 6-8 PM**

**St. Paul the Apostle Catholic Church, 6400 Spring Street, Racine**

(See accompanying flyer)

### *Care Consultations*

Paulette Kisse, Outreach Specialist from the Alzheimer's Assn. will be available for two meetings with families dealing with dementia on **Wednesday, April 25th** . at the **Ives Grove County Building**, 14200 Washington Avenue. Sturtevant. Appointment times are 1:45-2:45 and 3:00-4:00 PM.

For an appointment call **Felicia Elias, 833-8761**

**Marilyn Joyce, Caregiver Support Specialist,  
Aging and Disability Resource Center of Racine County  
262- 833-8764 [marilyn.joyce@goracine.org](mailto:marilyn.joyce@goracine.org)**