



FAMILY CAREGIVER NEWSLETTER

MARCH 2013

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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

Mad isn't All Bad

Doug is a 55-year-old man who has lived with his father Henry for the past four years. Doug owned a business in another city until his father had a stroke and needed help. There was no one to care for him except Doug, who closed his business and came to live with his Dad. At the time, he thought he would establish another business and manage it from home. His dad's needs and demands, however, have not permitted him any time to devote to his own livelihood. Doug often feels that his situation is desperate. He wants to care for Henry, who was a cared for Doug's mother for many years. On the other hand, Doug's lonely, tedious daily routines are driving him "up the wall", and he's worried about his own future. When his father calls him to ask the umpteenth trivial question in an hour, Doug answers through clenched teeth, "I've told you a thousand times..." and he feels like striking out. "I shouldn't be angry at my father," he tells himself. Yet he wants to just pound the wall with his fists or run away. His heart races much of the time, and he has painful spasms in his back and neck. He has taken to eating too many sweets and drinking more and more beer. That's how he gets by from day to day without being abusive.

Dorothy is an active, 64-year-old grandmother who cares for her husband Bill, 69, diagnosed two years ago with "probable Alzheimer's disease." Dorothy retired from her job as a nurse so that she could help care for her grandchildren as her daughter is a single mom. Bill has become more and more dependent on Dorothy to figure out the world around him. He follows her around like a shadow and asks the same questions over and over. When the grandchildren are around, he insults them. He accuses Dorothy of having an affair, and belittles her every day. Dorothy feels overwhelmed and furious. She needs help from her children, but they are "just too busy with the kids' sports." She feels pulled apart between Bill and the grandchildren. She feels cheated out of opportunities for fun and travel in her retirement. Sometimes she feels so angry that she wants the caregiving to just be over. Dorothy has frequent headaches and difficulty sleeping. She knows her blood pressure is dangerously high, but she hasn't told her doctor about it. She just can't think straight these days. Making and keeping a medical appointment seems overwhelming.

Anger can be like the burning lava that spews from a deep volcano. A sludge of other emotions builds up in our hearts and minds - hurt, pain, frustration, disappointment, loss and envy all seethe beneath the surface until the body and psyche can no longer contain them. Then we explode with anger – in words, deeds, illness, toxic thoughts, and self-destructive behaviors. How can a caregiver best respond to this potentially harmful process?

Taming the Fire

First of all, please recognize that these emotions are normal reactions to your situation. They are neither good nor bad. They just are. Your action (or inaction), however, can be very damaging to others and yourself. So in the immediate moment of rage, it's best to regain some composure. In other words, in the midst of the high-warp stress that anger creates, you need to return to some equilibrium, not only to ward off violence, but to protect your own health! Some helpful hints from people include; take some deep, belly breaths, leave the situation for awhile, pray, meditate, count to 20, or use a clear "I" message e.g. "I am feeling very angry right now." It is helpful to become an observer of your own mood and notice the first signs of feeling on the brink of a meltdown."

Nonverbal vocal release of anger can be effective. Some caregivers scream in their car or the basement, or a secluded area. Some hiss, moan, cry or make other sounds for which they have no words. After vocalizing anger people say their body relaxes and they feel both calm and energized. Other helpful techniques include; humor, enjoying your senses (e.g. listening to music or looking at something beautiful), having a good cry, and finding something to be grateful for.

But calming down is only the Band-Aid, not the cure. To really take care of your anger, you must treat the whole volcano. You must realize that all emotions have a message, and often the message is that something needs to change. To find and act upon that message, you need time to reflect on your situation, someone to talk with, and a chance to make and carry out a plan.

Finding the Meaning in the Flames

Here's what anger and its underlying feelings call for:

Expression – Talk to someone who understands like; a good friend, a Caregiver Support Specialist or support group, perhaps someone in your faith community, or; join an online caregiver community or email a friend, write in a journal. You may need to express the same feelings several times. One caregiver tells about her “ ‘listening partner’ – a friend who knows her situation and is willing to listen for ten minutes or so without the need to give advice, correct, or interrupt with ‘pious renderings’ ”.
(Pressure Points: Alzheimer’s and Anger. Duke Family Support Program, Durham, N.C.)
Support group buddies make good listening partners!

Examination and Self-Reflection - to learn the meaning of your feelings. This is best done in the company of a trusted person – a professional counselor or wise friend.

Ask yourself these questions:

What is boiling deep in the volcano? Sadness? Lost hopes and dreams? Hurt? Frustration? A feeling of imprisonment? What attributes of your particular situation are contributing to your angst? Do you have a support system? How has your relationship been with your care receiver over the years? What is your age and financial situation? What are you missing out on at this time in your life? How is your health? Are you having pain? Why are you a caregiver? Is there meaning in what you're doing?

Caregiving doesn't happen in a vacuum. It grows from lifelong patterns and relationships. It's more complicated than you ever thought.

Education - Learn what to expect given your care receiver's condition, your family situation, and your resources. You'll need information on medical conditions, community resources, and how to thrive as a person during the caregiving years. Information can be gathered from health care professionals, websites, printed materials, or the Aging and Disability Resource Center. From caregiver classes, you can learn how to cope with difficult situations; effective communication techniques; principles of self-care; and how to accept what you cannot change, change what you can, and tell the difference. You also learn that YOU ARE NOT ALONE.

Exercise - is absolutely one of the best ways to transform the madness of anger into the energy to plan and change. It also helps to prevent the damage stress chemicals wreak on your body. Punching bags and balls make better recipients of aggressive energy than people or frying pans! Provide yourself with good substitutes for aggression. If all you can do is walk around the house, do it with gusto. If you can put a punching bag in the basement, that's a blessing! Other good health habits of nutrition, hydration, rest, and healthy breathing are also important allies in transforming toxic anger into clarity.

As you discover the meaning of your feelings and decide on a change (even if it's a baby step), you will need to STAND UP AND SPEAK OUT! Your family may not have a clue about what it means to be a primary caregiver. They don't know that caregiving takes a family team and is not a one-person job. YOU are the expert in this area, but they may not know that. Educate them with more patience than they deserve! Patience is easier on your health than bitterness and also more likely to bring help!

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 (638-833-8777) or www.adrc.racineco.com.

Daily Comforts for Caregivers by Pat Samples, published by Fairview Press

This little book is an excellent source of support for many caregivers. There is a short reading for every day of the year on a variety of topics common to family caregivers. Some that pertain to anger are:

- “Crabbiness” (June 3)
- “Impatience” (June 11)
- “Bad Moods” (July 13)
- “Vocal Release” (September 6)
- “Rage as Energy” (November 8)

A limited number of copies are available free of charge from the ADRC. Please call 262-833-8764, if you'd like a copy mailed to you. This wonderful book can also be purchased online, from the publisher, or at bookstores. The price is around \$12-15. It is a very wise investment!

Support Groups for Family Caregivers

First Thursday 10:30AM-12Noon

Alzheimer's Association Group — MAR. 7

For Families Dealing with Alzheimer's and other Dementias
Lincoln Lutheran Office Building, 2000 Domanik Drive, 4th Floor

First Friday 12N-1PM MAR.1

"Caregiver Connection" Telephone Group

Call 262-833-8762 to pre-register.

Second Tuesday 1:30-3:00 pm

MAR. 12

Yorkville United Methodist Church

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

Second Saturday 10:30AM-12N

MAR. 9

Atonement Lutheran Church, 2915 Wright Ave., Racine
Park and enter in back of building (on South side).

Third Wednesday 1:30-3:00 PM

MAR. 20

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

Third Thursday 6:00-7:30 PM

Alzheimer's Association Group MAR. 21

For Families Dealing with Alzheimer's and other Dementias

Atonement Lutheran Church, 2915 Wright Avenue, Racine

Park and enter in back of building (on South side).

Other Events for Caregiving Families

From the Alzheimer's Association

Savvy Caregiver

Please see accompanying flyer for description and registration information

Paulette Kissee, Outreach Specialist, will be available for two family consultations on
Wednesday, **MAR. 27** between 2 and 4 pm.

at the Racine County Ives Grove County Offices, 14200 Washington Avenue. Sturtevant
For an appointment call **Felicia Elias, 262-833-8761**

Caregiving Relationships

A workshop about caregiving issues, including stress, emotions, effective communication, problem-solving , decision-making, and more.

Three Saturdays 10:30AM-12:30 PM, beginning March 16th.

See accompanying flyer for more information.

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