

Ten Ways You Can Support Caregivers

1. See Them!

Caregivers either deny or resist the idea that they are caregiving (no, I'm just doing what a spouse does) or underplay the level of effort involved. It helps a person who is giving care to show that you see them as carers.

2. Acknowledge Them!

Caregivers become used to being number two. A question that makes a big difference is the one so many fail to ask, "how are YOU doing?" But be aware that the likely answer, "fine" might be hiding a torrent of emotion.

3. Be Prepared to Listen.

Caregivers become isolated when they feel others are impatient with their "complaints". It's true, caregivers have a turmoil of ambiguous feelings. Having someone willing to listen without judgement is a big relief.

4. Offer respite.

This can be tricky because the cared for might resist substitute caregivers. A regular commitment is best of all. Preventing caregiver burnout or compassion fatigue can be addressed by regular breaks to be counted on.

5. Be alert to the signs of burnout

One of the difficult elements of burnout is that the carer suffering this may not be aware.

6. Don't ask "Can I help?"

Help is necessary and welcome, but the best support is given without the carer having to ask for it. However, make commitments you can stick to. (Caregivers need to be ready with their list of tasks that can be passed on.)

7. Resist giving unasked for advice.

A hallmark of this is the phrase "you should..." Offering perspective and giving guidance can be extremely helpful, since caregivers are so isolated. However, hold back on such conversations until the carer is able to hear.

8. Watch your mouth!

There are many common things that people say that are usually not helpful to the caregiver. Example: "I know just how you feel". But worse than saying the wrong thing is saying nothing!

9. You can never give too much encouragement.

Balm on the soul of a carer is a comment like, "you are doing such a great job". Carers suffer in silence with guilt, and the feeling that they are not doing enough or doing it right. Help the carer to banish this negativity.

10. Share the caregiver story.

One in four Canadians and Americans has been involved in caregiving and all have stories that they could tell. But they don't. This means that the caregiver and the role of family caregiving in health care systems is dismissed. Unfortunately, this invisibility means that there is little incentive for policy makers and politicians to support caregivers.

What is the goal of support to caregivers?

That caregivers feel recognized, respected and supported for all they do.

This handout is part of a forum with Janet Dunnett on April 7, 2019

Janet Dunnett is the author of a well regarded memoir of caregiving:
The Dwindling: A Daughter's Caregiving Journey to the Edge of Life.
Buy it locally in the bookstore of the Bibliotecha Publica, or Garrison and Garrison Bookstore (on Hidalgo)
It is also available on Amazon in print or as e-book.

Visit Janet's website and blog on [www.http//journeyspress.ca](http://journeyspress.ca)