

Asking for Help: Meeting the Emotional Needs of Caregivers

Cancer is a family experience. There are times when the “family” may be one person who assumes the primary role of the caregiver. Even though family members, friends and neighbors may offer help, caregivers may feel they are alone.

The stress of care giving takes a toll physically and emotionally. Some of the physical challenges caregivers may experience include *sleeping difficulties, changes in eating habits, fatigue, stress induced illnesses and exhaustion*. The stress caregivers experience may lead to emotional issues such as fear, anxiety, loneliness and depression. One way caregivers can help themselves is by asking others for help.

It is sometimes difficult for caregivers to ask for help. Caregivers may know they need it – but don’t ask. Below are some reasons why caregivers may feel uncomfortable asking for help:

I don’t want to be a burden – rather than being a burden, allowing people to help is a gift a caregiver gives to others. Most people want to help. Don’t deprive them of the opportunity to help. They are probably waiting for you to ask and feel helpless and frustrated when you don’t.

I don’t know what kind of help to ask for – it is often helpful to make a list of those chores, activities and obligations that others can easily do. Examples are grocery shopping, walking the dog, taking the children to school or taking the patient to an appointment so you can rest.

Other people are busy too – that is true, but most people will find the time to help a caregiver who needs rest and renewal. They may even thank you for the chance to help.

I don’t want the patient to feel abandoned. Many patients want the caregiver to take care of themselves and are glad to see them take a break and ask for help. In fact, many patients wish the caregiver would take a break to relieve them of the guilt they feel about requiring so much help from the caregiver.

Sometimes a caregiver needs more help with emotional concerns than family or friends can provide. In that event, it is important to speak with a professional to assess the situation. The patient’s social worker is a good place to start. You can request the services of a social worker by contacting (813) 745-8407.

If you are a caregiver, remember: Asking for help is not a weakness – it is a gift you give to others and to yourself.



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