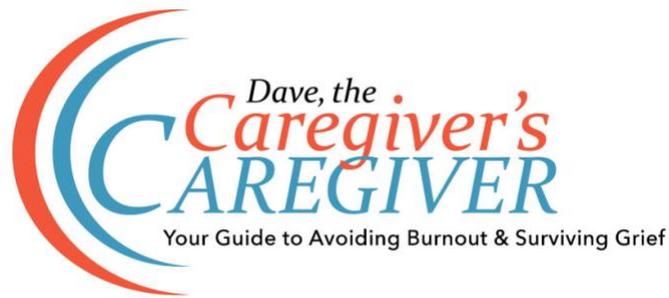




BEAUTIFUL BOUNDARIES



Boundaries

Boundaries are one of many things you will need to master if you expect to become a healthy, happy caregiver who stays alive and stays out of the hospital. I want to shock you with the same statistic that I keep repeating to you over and over again in my materials. ***“30% of caregivers die before their loved ones do. 60% become sicker than the ones they care for, and eventually will need a caregiver of their own.”***

Keep saying to yourself, ***“I will NOT become a statistic!”*** Boundaries are a very important part of *not* becoming a statistic. This is the ability to know *when* to say “yes,” and *when* to say “no.”

I know it sounds easy, but it's not. Most caregivers are very compassionate, empathetic and sympathetic individuals. That's why you will be a *great* caregiver, because you care. But there is a problem when you care *too much*. When you value your life *over* your loved one's life. When helping others hurts you. When you enable and reward behavior that is detrimental to you, and your mental, physical or emotional health.



Often caregivers unnecessarily sacrifice their own lives to provide long-term care for their loved ones. Obviously, this is unacceptable. If you go down, you both go down. Your life has to be slightly *more* important and valuable than your loved one. If not, you will sacrifice your life for theirs, and you both lose. You no longer have a life, and your loved one no longer has a great caregiver.

Get into the habit to focus your attention on your own needs, and create a long-term plan so that you, as well as your loved one, experiences life to its fullest. You will be given practical techniques that can be immediately applied to your life to decrease stress and increase a sense of wellbeing, health and optimism.

So let's get started! Exercises will be provided that help you assess your ability to care for yourself, monitor your stress level and vulnerability to burnout, and specific strategies to have your needs addressed while insuring that your loved ones receives quality care.

As I mentioned already above, the two most important words you'll use as a caregiver are "Yes" and "No." You might be very good at saying yes, or maybe you didn't have the choice to say no. A lot of people, especially caregivers, want to help others.

Either way, it's also common for caregivers to take on much more than they can handle, but this can lead to some negative results:

_____ Feeling guilty for letting other people down. **Do you often feel guilty?**

_____ Resentful about having too much to do for others. **Do you often feel resentful?**

_____ Feeling obligated to sacrifice their own needs. **Do you often feel obligated?**

If you answered "yes" to any of these questions, you may be taking on much more than you can handle. Practice saying "no" in the mirror. Make a game out of it. See how many different ways you can say "no" by fluctuating your volume, tone, intensity, pitch, etc. Then at the very end, say politely, "What part of "no" do0n't you understand?" You aren't really being mean or rude, you are taking care of you, no one else can but you.

When our loved ones were in the throes of their trauma, focusing on their needs was the appropriate response. During those times, it was often common for caregivers to live on adrenaline, late night cups of coffee and heightened emotions day after day after day. In fact, it can even become a lifestyle if we're not careful.

You may not be as dependent as your loved one is to meet your needs, but your needs are as valid as those of your loved one. It is equally important to have your needs met as it is for the person who is in need of special care. Making priorities, balancing your commitments, assessing and deciding the best course of action for your care-receiver, and learning new skills will all make you a better caregiver. Just because *you* can walk better than a two-year-old, doesn't mean that you can walk a tightrope without practice. Anytime you're trying a new thing...it will feel unfamiliar to you, even uncomfortable or painful at first.

If you are miserable, you won't be able to provide hope and comfort to your loved one. If you feel exhausted, like a dying battery, you will be unable to accurately recognize their needs or properly care for them. With the best of intentions, you may undermine your health and wellbeing and become ill yourself. There



are times when you must acknowledge that your life is important and say "No." Saying no can be hard because most of us have been taught to feel guilty about it. We feel selfish. If you've been brought up in a Christian home, you have probably been taught that to sacrifice yourself for others is a spiritual value.

Questions to Answer:

1. Do you feel furious one minute, and then sad and helpless the next?

Less [1] [2] [3] [4] [5] More

2. Do you catch every bug that comes your way?

Less [1] [2] [3] [4] [5] More

3. Do you find yourself snapping at everyone?

Less [1] [2] [3] [4] [5] More

4. Do you know you should exercise, but you just don't have the time?

Less [1] [2] [3] [4] [5] More

5. Can you remember the last time you met a friend for dinner or a movie?

Less [1] [2] [3] [4] [5] More

6. Are you always the “go-to” caregiver?

Less [1] [2] [3] [4] [5] More

Scoring:

A score of **24 to 30** means you are either burned out or very close to it.

A score of **13 to 23** means you may be rapidly approaching burnout, but if you act quickly, you might be able to avoid it.

A score of **6 to 12** means that you are most likely a healthy caregiver, however, if your score is closer to 12 than it is to 6, you may need to begin focusing on putting your needs first a little more often.

More information from AARP to help you with your scores...

1. You feel furious one minute, sad and helpless the next. Whatever you call it — second-hand stress or the more serious caregiver burnout — the despairing mix of physical and emotional exhaustion strikes many caregivers at one time or another. As you ride the emotional roller coaster of caregiving, you’re easily overwhelmed and angry. You can’t eat or you eat too much. You’re exhausted even after a night’s sleep. Your brain is foggy and you no longer care about the things that used to bring you joy.

The fix: Your life has changed in profound ways, so it’s natural to feel frustrated and to grieve for what you have lost. But untreated anxiety or depression is serious, and you can’t take good care of anyone if you don’t take of yourself.

First, check in with your doctor to rule out any medical conditions that can trigger symptoms of mental health problems. Let your doctor know that you are a caregiver and might need support to be able to continue in this role.

Finally, remind yourself that while you are doing everything you can, you will never do everything — and that's OK too.

2. You catch every bug that comes your way. Stress doesn't just make you anxious and depressed. It takes a toll on a toll on your immune system. If you are getting sick more often and staying sick longer than you used to, your body is trying to tell you something. Listen up!

The fix: Don't let routine checkups slide because you don't think you have the time. See your primary care doctor and your dentist regularly. Ditto for immunizations, mammograms and other recommended screenings. Eating a nutritious diet and getting at least seven hours of sleep a night boosts your body's natural defenses.

3. You're snapping at everyone. When you feel helpless and overwhelmed, you're more likely to overreact to the things people do, or don't do. Like a toddler having a tantrum, you need a timeout.

The fix: Don't set the bar so high that you can never meet it. Pick up the phone and make a call to a friend. Studies show that simply giving voice to your frustrations and fears dials down tension and eases the isolation that shadows caregivers.

Mapping out a daily routine that you try to stick to will also give you a greater sense of control. Prioritize your to-do list, whether it's grocery shopping or taking Mom to a doctor's appointment. Don't worry about things lower down on the list that don't get done.

4. You know you should exercise, but you just don't have the time. No one functions well in crisis mode day after day. Caregiving is a marathon, not a sprint. You need to find a way to dial down the tension.

The fix: Force yourself to get moving. Exercise is the best stress reliever. Not only will you feel better right away, the surge of endorphins that exercise triggers lifts your mood, clears your head and helps you sleep better at night. A brisk 30-minute walk or jog on the treadmill, even a 10-minute walk around the block, jump-starts your brain, soothes nerves and powers up your immune system.

5. You can't remember the last time you met a friend for dinner or a movie.

Everyone needs a break from time to time, so why don't you give yourself one? Caregivers — motivated by a mix of love, loyalty and a dash of guilt — rarely do.

The fix: We're not suggesting a two-week Caribbean cruise, though that would be lovely, right? An overnight visit with a college friend, a night at a bed and breakfast, even a few hours to write in your journal, sip a cup of hot tea while you read a book or watch reruns of your favorite sitcom, can be restorative. One caveat: Taking a break doesn't mean running errands or doing chores. It's you time.

6. You're the go-to caregiver. Always.

This may be the hardest jobs you'll ever have, and it can take time to adjust and come to terms with it. But try going it alone and you'll quickly hit bottom.

The fix: Establish a network of relatives, friends or people in the community you can call on. Schedule a family meeting or video chat about who does what and who pays for it. Let everyone know you will not be available to host holiday meals, organize the church book drive or any other draining activities that you've normally handled. Keep a to-do list with you and e grief process whip it out when others ask if they can help. Your neighbor might be happy to spend a few hours at your house while you go to the gym. A friend can buy groceries when she's at the store. Meanwhile, join a local or online support group so you can connect with sympathetic ears and glean ideas for coping better. Be aware that there are a wide range of programs and professionals out there who can help make the job easier for you.