

The Caregiving Rollercoaster



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Caring for an older adult can sometimes feel like a rollercoaster ride. Much of the time you're happy and fulfilled as you spend time with your loved one. Then there are times when you feel overwhelmed and stressed by the challenges of caregiving. Frustration and guilt often follow. Then your loved one thanks you for all the work you do and you feel love and joy once more. These emotional ups and downs often occur throughout the course of one day. When you are caregiving, life becomes a rollercoaster ride that doesn't stop to let you off!

It is normal to experience a large array of emotions when providing care for a loved one. Caregivers who report higher levels of satisfaction have learned the skill of managing their negative emotions. They are also able to focus on all the benefits of caregiving:

- Being able to spend more time with someone you love
- Feeling enhanced self-worth, a sense of achievement for helping someone
- An opportunity to "give back" to someone important
- Having an increased sense of purpose in life

But no matter how positive a person is, negative feelings will still come around. The first step toward managing these feelings is to recognize them before they become problematic.

Some common emotions that creep up on caregivers are frustration, anger, fear, and guilt. Some early warning signs of these feelings may be tension, headaches, and increased impatience. As soon as you recognize negative feelings heading your way, step back and calm yourself before they take over. The following techniques can help keep negative emotions at bay:

- Take some slow, deep breaths.
- Look at the event in a different way. Try to understand the other person's perspective.
- Leave the room for a while.
- Remember the good times.
- Participate in physical activity.
- Concentrate on the benefits and rewards of caregiving.

When you are calm again, think about what triggered the negative emotion and how it could have been avoided. You can use negative feelings as a catalyst for change. You may find you need more respite care, a change in routine, an outlet for emotional needs such as a support group, or to distribute tasks to family members or friends.

Negative emotions may not be pleasant, but they don't have to control you. Learn to recognize the warning signs, calm yourself and initiate change to keep the negative emotions at bay.

Life as a caregiver is like a rollercoaster ride, so buckle up and prepare for a thrilling ride! If you'd like more information about caregiving resources, please contact your Aging and Disability Resource Center.

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