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Becoming an Exceptional Caregiver

If you are now a part of the growing number of family caregivers that provide 80% of all long term care, you may be experiencing additional stress in your life. You are no longer just a daughter, son, husband, wife ... you are a family caregiver. Whether it is emotional or physical, stress is a common reaction that can impact even the most resilient person. Your health and well-being is vital to you being the best caregiver to the person you assist. Here are some tips to improve your chances of not only becoming a successful caregiver, but a stronger person. These skills can transfer to other parts of your life!

- **Manage your own health:** Take time to do what you need to care for yourself. Eating right, getting enough sleep, making time to exercise and going to your own doctor as needed will enable you to be the best you.
- **Educate yourself:** The more you know about what you are dealing with, the more confidence you will have. Learn about the diseases your family member has. It allows you to ask better questions and be the best advocate for them.
- **Maintain a balance in your life:** Life is meant to be lived. Joyful times replenish your soul and lessen the impact of more difficult times. Do something that you love every single day.
- **Acknowledge your feelings:** Good, bad or ugly, emotions are all part of caregiving. Talking can lessen their impact. Find a non-judgmental friend, caregiver, support group or counselor to talk through how you are feeling. Brainstorm ways to handle your emotions. Think of other times in your life when you have made it through difficult situations and use those tools.
- **Trust your instincts:** You know your family member/friend better than others. Share your knowledge with their doctors, nurses and other care providers. You can be a huge help in just sharing your insights.
- **Learn to say "No":** It is a complete sentence in and of itself. Eliminating other responsibilities can make caregiving more manageable. Keep the necessary chores and let the other ones go. If you say, "Yes" when you really mean "No", it just adds to your burden.
- **Recognize that your best is good enough:** There is no such thing as a perfect caregiver. Forgive yourself if things don't go as you hoped. Try to focus on the good things you have done. Your mind believes what you tell it.
- **Ask for help:** Support for you and your family member/friend can come from many places. Make a list of tasks that others can do. Let them choose. Put their skills with their wills. Remember how good you feel when you can help someone? Allow someone else to feel that way.
- **Become a master problem-solver.** Caregiving is a complicated puzzle that has more than one solution. When faced with a problem, list possible solutions, pick the most likely to work, try that option, evaluate the end result. If that one didn't work, go to solution number 2.

Family caregiving has many rewards, but with those rewards come struggles. This experience is an opportunity to not only assist the person, but learn a lot about yourself. Caregiving is a team sport! Rather than struggle on your own, contact **Aging Resources at (515) 255-1310** to learn about caregiving, managing your stress and discovering resources that will enable you to become an exceptional caregiver.

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