



“Take Care to Give Care”

November is National Family Caregiver Month

As a caregiver I heard advice from many well-intentioned people. The message was usually the same; you need to take care of yourself. November marks National Family Caregiver Month and the theme for 2016 is **“Take Care to Give Care”**. My caregiving experience left me with the realization that it is not always very easy to do and for some situations, almost impossible. Sometimes the advice felt like one more thing I was failing at which only added to the stress. Whenever I heard the analogy of being on a plane and “putting your own oxygen mask on before helping someone else”, I wanted to shout, “I know. It makes perfect sense but I can’t always do that.”

Caregivers often jeopardize their own health because they simply do not have enough hours to take care of themselves. If there is no other person a caregiver can rely on for help or respite, it is not practical to advise the caregiver to get out each day for exercise or simply take a break. Every caregiving situation is unique, but what is common is that the responsibilities are constant and time consuming so that stress is significant and there is little time for oneself.

What can a caregiver do about managing stress and avoiding risking one’s own health?

Janice Wyner, Caregiver Support Specialist at North Shore Elder Services (NSES), acknowledges the difficulty for many caregivers who do not have a reliable support system who can step in and offer some relief. “People have to think of this role as a journey with many turns and twists in the road. You can be mindful about that journey and in the quiet spaces be kind to yourself. Positive self-talk helps. If you can tell yourself, ‘I didn’t do “X” but I was able to do “Y and Z” and I am happy with that,’ then you are acknowledging that you have done the best you can.

Key to taking care of yourself is recognizing the signs of stress. Check out www.agingcare.com for an article on the ten signs of caregiver stress. At North Shore Elder Services, we encourage caregivers to make it a priority to make time for oneself. We understand how hard that can be especially for those without family and/or friends who can step in to help. However, we know that



Caregiver Connections Conference

“Brain Health For All”

FREE Nov. 5, 8:30-1pm at Peabody Marriott. For more info visit www.nselder.org under Events

Dementia Conversations

A FREE Alzheimer’s Assoc. Training for Family Caregivers at NSES on Nov.14, 4-6pm

Register with Kathy Perrella, NSES, 978-624-2214

Caregiver Resources:

Our Family Caregiver Specialists have identified concerns & questions that are commonly discussed in support groups and counseling sessions. Check our blog at

www.nselder.org for our monthly Caregiver topic. We’ll provide you with some resources & options for handling specific issues.

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support and respite really do help the caregiver stay the course.

We know that there are proven strategies for controlling stress. The caregiver needs to enlist and accept support. It is typical of caregivers to lose contact with people because of time constraints but this is when you need people the most. Asking for help is paramount to surviving the rigors of caregiving.

North Shore Elder Services' Family Caregiver Support Program Specialists and Options Advisors are an excellent starting point to asking for help. They can arm you with information about caregiver resources and the options available to you. NSES' **Kathy Perrella** and **Pat McMahan** are experienced at guiding caregivers through issues they encounter. They understand situations are complicated and that dispensing advice to "take care of yourself" is not always the most valuable suggestion to pass along.

"We can't just tell someone to get physically active without offering how to fit that in when it feels like there is no time. Together we can help caregivers set realistic goals and identify what can and can't change. We encourage caregivers to learn to say no to requests when things are too stressful."

"One of the best solutions to taking care of oneself is to surround yourself with others going through similar experiences. Support groups are important to feel that you are not alone in your caregiving role. Someone else in the group has been there and done that and can advise you. Support groups, even for those who are not group joiners, can offer moments of clarity and stress release. It is a safe environment in which you can express any emotion, positive and negative, and it be accepted as valid. Sometimes just being heard is enough support to get a caregiver through the day."

This month of November we are reminded of the large numbers of caregivers providing care to loved ones. If you know someone in this role, show your support by recognizing the importance of their work and the sacrifices they are undoubtedly making. If you want to find out more about how our specialists can help guide you, call North Shore Elder Services at 978-750-4540 or visit our website at www.nselder.org.

"Take Care to Give Care" can be a challenge for caregivers but there are ways we can help you.

- *Jayne Girodat, NSES*

To read our blog in it's entirety, you can find it under the heading News & Media at www.nselder.org