Caregivers as Advocates…Six Degrees of Connection

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Because you are reading this, you are already demonstrating advocacy for yourself and others! You are connected by circumstances and people in your network – those you know now and those you have yet to meet through ‘six degrees of connection!’

Caregiving is a visceral experience, not an intellectual pursuit.

What are your six degrees of people and resource connection?

Advocacy

- Dictionary definitions – Support, recommendation, active espousal, champion, campaign for, promote, encourage, defend and much more…
- Respect your own boundaries/expectations as well as those of the person in your care. Have the ‘wisdom to know the difference’ between knowing when to say ‘yes’ and when to say ‘no’ Often, the ability to say ‘no’ opens your mind and heart to new possibilities for saying ‘yes.’

1st Degree – Attitude

- Awareness = enlightenment!
- Self affirmation = acknowledgment of capabilities within context of realistic expectations
- Self acceptance is the ‘courage to be imperfect.’ When we accept self (esteem) without judgment (self esteem), we can accept and respect others.
- Self expression - “I” statements. I am [emotion] when you [describe situation] vs. “you” or blaming statements.
- Determine triggers for both positive and negative feelings. Can you reframe your experience?
- Role of anger (handout). Letting go of the anger connection (negative) allows space for a positive connection (readjust, resolve, renew)
- Values and expectations about caregiving.
  - If you resent, STOP!
  - Guilt – Stop the madness of the ‘gift that keeps on giving’ (but not in a good way!) 😊
  - The Promise – That you will take responsibility for someone’s safety and well being – no matter where they live
- Honor the present moment as the ‘present’
  - Humor is ‘the music of the soul’. Laugh with, not at someone. Allow yourself to find the humor in caregiving, and seek ongoing contact with friends and others who are upbeat, and who will listen to you when you need a boost.
  - If you can’t change your circumstances, then you have to change your attitude. How? Set limits, plan time for yourself to ‘destress and decompress.’
2nd Degree – Education
- “Seek to understand, then be understood,” says Stephen Covey (*Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*). How does it feel to ‘wear someone else’s clothes’ especially when they are in poor health? Ask.
- Problem-solving – Define problem, brainstorm, prioritize, implement, evaluate
- Gather information about community resources and people who can help out with caregiving

3rd Degree - Action
- Problem-solving – Define problem, brainstorm, prioritize, implement, evaluate
- Self care is a right, not a privilege! Take time for yourself without guilt.
- Plan ahead by making sure that all financial and legal documents are in place including an estate plan/will and testament or trust, advance directives (living will and medical power of attorney), durable power of attorney and insurance plans.

4th Degree – Encouragement
- Give yourself unceasing credit for what you contribute to the life of someone in your care. Whether or not you are a caregiver out of love or obligation, you are adding a dimension of quality and dignity to the person’s existence that might not otherwise occur.
- Make "I" statements to others. I am [emotion] when you [describe situation] with unconditional positive regard. (Affirms the person, independent of specific behaviors that may not be appropriate.)
- Compassion – Spend quality time with the person in your care. This is“with-ness”, companionship, being vs. doing, interdependence (empathy and responsibility) vs. dependence (sympathetic savior)
- Finding the sacred in yourself gives you the opportunity to connect with the sacred in another person.
- Learn one or two quick and simple relaxation and self-affirmation exercises, and practice them daily. Making this commitment to yourself will benefit your care recipient, too. Maybe you can practice a relaxation exercise together.
- Develop and maintain regular, planned events that are pleasurable and relaxing. Give you an opportunity for self-renewal.
- If your loved one is mentally and emotionally capable, take a risk by sharing some of your thoughts and feelings about what is happening in an honest, but respectful way. Come to some agreement about each other’s limitations as well as strengths. Learn to share your fears, and most importantly, learn to share your hopes.

5th Degree – Team-building
- Creative collaboration.
  ✓ Include caregivee in activities that use their skills and experience, but are realistic
  ✓ Know your resources/plan – people, living situation/environment/location, emotional capacity, finances, legal documents
- Define roles and responsibilities for people who can help
• Avoid unrealistic expectations of yourself, the person for whom you are caring, and others who assist with care.

• Ask for other family members, friends and professionals to help you. Remember: you, your loved one and the people who assist with caregiving are part of the same team. Be specific and direct in explaining what you want them to do, or what you need.

• If you hire home care workers or respite workers, supervise them enough so that they are accountable without micro-managing them. Treat them as part of the “team” that is giving care – trust encourages people to do a better job.

6th Degree - Networking

• Develop a people support network – personal and professional; caregiver support networks

• Seek out and cultivate at least one professional (mental health professional or minister) who understands the impact of your caregiving experience. Maintain regular contact with this person, and evaluate both your challenges and your successes.

• Gather information about community resources and people who can help out with caregiving

Your challenge, and opportunity, is to experience Serendipity – the phenomenon of turning adversity into inspiration!