

Catholic Caregivers

'Caregiving is pro-life!'

Help for Men Who Are Family Caregivers

In many ways, today's male caregivers are pioneers, playing a much more active — and sometimes primary — role in caring for a loved one.

Historically, a wife, daughter or daughter-in-law was most likely to be the family caregiver. In their formative years, men weren't necessarily taught how to provide the kind of help a care-receiver needs. It wasn't expected that they would learn it or give it.

Now that continues to change. According to a 2009 report by the National Alliance for Caregiving in collaboration with AARP, a third of family caregivers are men.

No doubt, like their female counterparts, they've quickly discovered caregiving can be one of the most challenging times of their lives.

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But, at the same time and generally speaking, it can be different for a man who's helping his spouse, aging parent, or other loved one. Harder to provide personal assistance, like bathing or dressing. Harder not to have "the answer" and not to be able to "just fix" the problem or problems. Harder to admit to others he's at the end of his rope. Harder to ask for help.

With that in mind, here are a few suggestions and points to consider if you're a male caregiver:

--Boot camp, raising kids and surviving for years in the workplace "jungle" may seem like walks in the park compared to what you're doing now.

--Yes, caregiving can be lonely but, no, you don't have to go it alone. Look into respite care.

Even a few hours a week can make a big difference. Consider what formal and informal help may be available. (Formal would be a visiting healthcare worker or adult day center, for example. Informal could be family, friends and fellow parishioners.)

--You may have never been much of a joiner or "sharer" (more the loner, tight-lipped Gary Cooper type of fellow), but you may find a support group very helpful. Some groups are "guys only." Some focus on a particular issue, such as Alzheimer's disease or cancer.

--It's OK if there are some things you just can't do. Maybe it's personal care. You can hire someone to help with that. Then, too, even if there are things you can do maybe your time is better spent with your care-receiver. Again, it may mean hiring someone (for that cooking and cleaning, for example) so you can spend more time doing something pleasant with your loved.

--Realize that you may already be grieving. Because of dementia, Mom or Dad is slipping away. Because of your wife's illness, the retirement hopes and dreams the two of you had just aren't going to be possible.

--Do something fun just for you. At first glance this may seem selfish but it will help you become a better caregiver. (And, certainly, if you and your care-receiver's roles were reversed, you'd want that person to take a break and do something he or she enjoyed.)

--Begin or deepen your spiritual side. Be aware that, in the midst of it all, the God who asked you to help his beloved son or daughter is always with you. Always.

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For a free copy of "The Little Book of Caregiver Prayers," call the Friends of St. John the Caregiver at 1-800-392-JOHN (5646). For more caregiver topics, visit www.YourAgingParent.com.

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