

Avoiding Burnout: Caregiving in a Pandemic

Written by Brandon C. Walecka, Esq.

In recognition of November being National Family Caregiver Month, a time to celebrate the tireless contributions of caregivers, here are some tips and strategies to avoid caregiver burnout, a risk under any circumstances, but especially as you care for your loved one in these unprecedented times.

For many caregivers, balancing the COVID-19 pandemic along with every day needs of their loved one may give rise to stress, exhaustion, frustration, and feeling overwhelmed.

Sadly, you may also feel resentful towards family and friends who you feel have not offered enough help in caring for a loved one. Family and friends who have never been the primary caregiver may not know how hard the work is physically and emotionally. While others may want to help, they may not know what to do or how to offer help safely.

While it may be difficult to do, asking for help (if you have the option) may be in the best interest of the caregiver, care recipient, and all other family members. Help doesn't have to be expensive or time consuming; every little bit really does help. Consider the tips below to help you or a loved one get through a tough time:

Planning. Many caregivers find peace of mind after having developed a plan. Create a list of necessary grocery items, upcoming appointments, and chores to do around the house. Many family and friends need only a bit of direction on what would be most helpful. Where ever possible, work with friends and family to address issues in advance (e.g., coordinating how to get your loved one to appointments). Perhaps you can request

someone help to shop for your loved one or identify someone who can, while practicing appropriate social distancing, provide your loved one with dinner or help around the house.

Get advice from an attorney. If you are a caregiver for a loved one, it is wise to plan in advance. The best time to talk to your loved one about estate planning is right now. You should encourage your loved one to speak with a qualified estate planning attorney to get certain legal paperwork in order (e.g. Durable Power of Attorney, Health Care Proxy, HIPAA Authorization, Last Will and Testament, etc.). This is especially true if you are handling bill payments, helping with doctor's appointments, and other end-of-life issues. Encourage your loved one to get their affairs in order to help bring peace of mind.

When is it time for long-term care placement? Deciding to move your loved one into a nursing home or assisted living facility can be a difficult decision riddled with conflicting feelings of guilt, relief, anxiety, and grief. Meeting with an elder law attorney can help a family explore options and explain the complex Medicaid (MassHealth in Massachusetts) rules and regulations that are difficult to navigate. Do your due diligence when researching and selecting a facility – if possible, tour the facility. Enlist your loved one's input in the decision as early as possible. By planning well, you can continue to be there for your loved one and provide support as they adjust to their new home.

Let the loved one help. The care recipient can help, too. Giving the loved one a simple task like helping with basic chores, within their capabilities, are a great way to help the loved one contribute and inspire a sense of productivity.

How to help a loved one adjust to the "new normal." It may be challenging for a loved one with a cognitive impairment to be able to adapt to all situations. It's important to talk to the loved one and try to support and guide them through changes in

their routine and activities due to the pandemic. If friends or family members are going to be visiting, perhaps consider talking about their visit in advance to prepare for the arrival of guests.

Your life became very different when you became a family caregiver, and you should not be in it alone. Enjoy the time with your loved one. You can care for your loved one, attend to your daily activities, and do it safely.

As always, there are wonderful local agencies that can help provide home-based assistance, such as Coastline Elderly Services, if you ever feel you need it. Research has shown that while caregiving can be accompanied by many challenges, it also can be deeply rewarding and meaningful. Remember, it can be done.

The information contained in this article is not intended to make you an expert on estate planning nor is this article intended to replace the need for the advice of a professional. Rather, this article is simply intended to provide a basic understanding of why estate planning is important for everybody and a basic understanding of some of the more common estate planning tools. This article does not constitute legal advice.

*Also see this same article published in [Coastline Elder Services, Inc.'s November 2020 Senior Scope Newsletter](#).
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