

The Caregiver Link

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QUOTES

“What a wonderful thought it is that some of the best days of our lives haven't even happened yet.”

~ Anne Frank

“ If you don't like something, change it. If you can't change it, change your attitude.”

~ Maya Angelou

“You do not find the happy life. You make it.”

~ Camilla Eyring Kimball

“Year's end is neither an end nor a beginning but a going on.”

~ Hal Borland

13 New Year's Resolutions for Caregivers

It's human to want a fresh start. Even though I know that December 31 of one year is rarely that different from January 1 of the next, I greet each New Year's Day as a new beginning. I can't explain it, but the first day of January always gives me a psychological boost, be it ever so brief.

Like most caregivers, I always strove for perfection and I always wound up feeling like I fell short. There is no way that I know of to be a perfect caregiver. The needs of any care receiver can change in an instant. We can miss subtle signals. We are often so tired and stressed that we may absentmindedly forget to pick up a prescription, check an adult brief or do the laundry. All of these things can bring on a huge case of unearned caregiver guilt.

It is so easy to get wrapped up in the difficult feelings and the pressure. Every so often, caregivers need to remind themselves that they are doing their personal best. The New Year is a perfect time to take inventory of our lives and see what improvements we can make. My thought is that we can look at the coming year with fresh eyes, even though that freshness may only last a moment.

Let's make a list of New Year's resolutions and pretend we'll keep them all. Even if you only stick to one of them, remember that progress is good, no matter how small.

New Year's Resolutions to Consider

1. I give myself permission to not keep the following resolutions or to keep them only partway.
2. When I feel I am imperfect, I will remember that guilt is not an option

as long as I know I did the best I could, given the circumstances.

3. I will find time alone for myself, even though that seems impossible. That may mean asking for help from people and sources I've never considered before.

4. Regardless of how deserving the source, I will say no to requests for my time when I know I can't add any more to my plate.



5. I will remember that family members and friends who are not care receivers deserve some of my time. This may mean a little less of my attention will go to my care receiver, and that is okay.

6. I will follow through with my own health care appointments and screenings, including dental cleanings and eye exams.

7. I will find a way to monitor my own energy levels so I can recharge my batteries before I hit the point of exhaustion and burnout.

8. I will remember that seeking advice from professionals, organizations and fellow caregivers is a sign of strength, not weakness.

9. I will remember that my care receiver didn't choose the illness or disability that he or she is living with.
10. I will remember that I didn't choose this life for my care receiver either, so I won't be a martyr to their illness.

11. I will remember that taking care of my own needs isn't selfish. Taking

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Dealing with Caregiver Guilt

Caregivers often carry around undeserved guilt, believing that they aren't doing enough for their loved ones. This guilt can make the caregiving role even more stressful than it already is. One might ask why a caregiver feels guilty when they're doing such a courageous job. Here are some reasons:

- **Resentment for personal time lost** – It's normal to feel like you're missing something when so much of your time is taken up taking care of someone else. The caregiver thinks that they shouldn't feel this way.
- **Unresolved issues** – Many times, there are issues stemming from childhood or arguments in the past that hinder the caregiving process. Many caregivers feel guilty about this.
- **Compare yourself to others** – Some caregivers will look at another caregiver and think that they could never accomplish what that other person did.
- **Knowing placement is inevitable** – There can be tremendous guilt involved when a caregiver has to place their loved one in assisted living or a nursing home.
- **Dealing with your own issues** – You may be dealing with personal or health problems yourself, which takes away from your caregiving responsibilities.

Ways to Cope with Caregiver Guilt

- **Acknowledge the guilt** – It's normal to feel guilt from time to time. Once it's recognized, we are better able to deal with it.
- **Look at the bigger picture** – Although you may be stressed with a particular situation now, it will not last forever. Look at the sacrifices you make for your loved one and realize that you are doing a great job.
- **Accept that you're human and have flaws** – All of us make mistakes from time to time. Some of us may be good at the physical aspects of caregiving, while others may be better able to handle the emotional toll. Recognize your strengths and don't focus on the negative.
- **Make time for yourself** – This is easier said than done, but it's a must! Even if it's just an hour or two a week, go out and have coffee with a friend, catch a movie, attend a caregiver support group, or just curl up and read a book. Taking time out helps you put your situation in better perspective.
- **Know that you are making the best decision for you and your loved one at that time** – This can be hard to

- accept, especially if you've made a promise to a loved one in the past that you can no longer keep. A change in a situation may force you to break that promise, but realize that the promise was made under different circumstances. You are making the best decision with new circumstances.
- **Deal with unresolved issues or accept them for what they are** – Many times, we may be taking care of someone who we resent, for many reasons. You can choose to try and resolve those feelings from the past to allow you to care for that person fairly. You can also choose to allow someone else to care for that person because you know you cannot rightfully do so. Either way, this is something you need to consider if your past with that person is an issue for you. Talk to a professional if necessary to make the best decision for both you and your loved one.
- **Reach out for support from family and friends;** seek caregiver support groups or professional help to work through your feelings of guilt. Know that you are not alone in your caregiving journey and the help is available. Most of all, remember that you are doing the best that you can!

by Malika Brown, MSW, LSW,
taken in part from caregiver.com

Resolving Family Conflicts

Have a family meeting. Talking about caregiving roles and responsibilities, problems, and feelings can help ease tensions. You may want help from a professional counselor or clergy.

Recognize differences. Some family members may be hands-on caregivers, responding immediately to issues and organizing resources. Others may be more comfortable with being told to complete specific tasks.

Share caregiving responsibilities. Make a list of tasks and include how much time, money, and effort may be involved to complete them. Divide tasks according to the family members' preferences and abilities.

Continue to communicate. Periodic family meetings or conference calls keep the family up-to-date and involved. Discuss how things are working, reassess the needs of both the person with Alzheimer's and the caregiver, and decide if any changes in responsibilities are needed.

~ Alzheimer's Disease & Related Disorders Association, Inc



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care of myself benefits everyone I love.

- 12. I will get appropriate help for myself if depression, anxiety or other mental health issues become apparent to me, my friends or my family.
- 13. I will be open to alternative ways of caring for myself. This can include massage, aroma therapy, some form of meditation, exercise, attending a support group, seeking out respite care, or meeting with a therapist.

This list is just a starting point. What resolutions would you add for yourself? Which would you delete? If you print out this list and hang it in a prominent place, you can work toward these goals a little bit every day. Even looking at it once a month will help you view your situation with a fresh perspective.

Remember, happiness isn't about perfection—it's about having realistic expectations. We all have room to adjust our expectations to more closely match reality, and that change alone can help us have a happier and more productive year.

By Carol Bradley Bursack,
taken in part from

[/www.agingcare.com/articles/caregiver-new-years-resolutions](http://www.agingcare.com/articles/caregiver-new-years-resolutions)

Give Yourself A Break--

Ideally caregivers should have a daily, weekly, monthly and yearly break.

Daily - Half an hour of yoga, meditation, needlepoint, reading, etc.

Weekly - A couple of hours spent away from the house at the mall, library, coffeehouse, etc.

Monthly - An evening out with your friends, a play, a concert, etc.

Yearly - A well-planned (and well-deserved) vacation.

Planning ahead for these breaks is imperative. You may need to arrange for respite care for your loved one.

It can be done. You can care for your loved one and attend to your daily activities. We all do what we can, and nobody should expect more than that from us. Especially ourselves.

Caregiver Support Groups

Muskegon County:

Senior Resources, Norton Shores

Every Friday 1-2:30 p.m.

All sessions are drop in - attend all or pick your topic. Call Virginia at 231-733-3531 for respite or more information.

Oceana County:

Oceana County Council on Aging, Hart

Every Tuesday 10-11:30 a.m.

The Ladder Community Center

Every Tuesday from 12:30-2:30 p.m.

All sessions are drop in - Call Virginia at 231-733-3531 for respite or more information.

Ottawa County:

The Day Center of Evergreen, Holland

Second Tuesday 12:30 p.m.

Fourth Tuesday 12:30 p.m.

Second Thursday 1 p.m. at Fair Haven Church in Hudsonville (respite available for all) Call Gloria VanHaitsma, 616-355-5153 for more information.

The Little Red House, Spring Lake

Every Thursday 10-11 a.m. Call Jim Powers ACSW for more information.

2020

HAPPY NEW YEAR

Senior Resources of West Michigan
560 Seminole Rd.
Muskegon, MI 49444-3720

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**The Mission Of Senior Resources
An Area Agency on Aging**

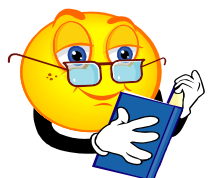
To provide a comprehensive and
coordinated system
of services designed
to promote the
independence and dignity of
older persons and their
families in Muskegon, Oceana,
and Ottawa counties —
a mission compelling us to
target older persons in greatest
need but to advocate for all.

To contact us, please call

Amy or Mary at:

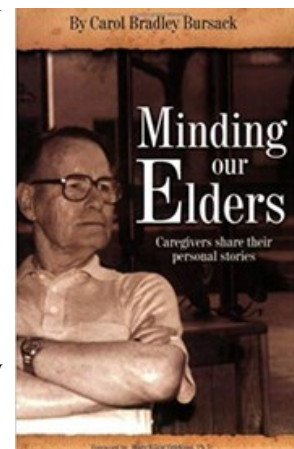
231-739-5858 or 800-442-0054

January's website: <https://eldercare.acl.gov/Public/Index.aspx>



Minding Our Elders: Caregivers Share Their Personal Stories Paperback – August 22, 2005
by Carol Bradley Bursack

Baby boomers are now facing the challenge of caring for their aging parents, and that challenge knows no borders. Some version of what has happened to the elderly people in my life and in the lives of the people I've interviewed, is happening or will happen to you, the reader, as well. Many of our elderly parents took their last breaths in a nursing home. Their health had deteriorated to a point where they couldn't safely stay in a family environment. You'll read of the turmoil many of us went through as we settled our loved ones in Rosewood on Broadway, or Elim, or Eventide. Homes in other areas will have different names, different physical configurations, different staff. That's immaterial. You'll go through the same agonizing process as you look for the best quality care available. You'll go through the same confusion as you try to find a way to work your parents' new environment into your own life. Some of our people are fortunate enough to die with family, in their own homes. Others die in a hospital. Some cling to a whisper of life in a nursing home. But for all, eventually, their journey must end. *Minding Our Elders* was written to support you as you travel the last leg of their journey with them. It was written to remind you that you are not alone.



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