

CAREGIVER'S SUPPORT GROUPS

— WHAT DO THEY DO?

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Being a caregiver is a lonely and difficult job, filled with emotions—frustration, guilt, feelings of helplessness, depression and endless obstacles and hardships. But we do not need to face these feelings and challenges alone! Caregiver support groups are available in many locations, sponsored by many different organizations.

A caregiver support group is designed to give the caregiver information about resources, provide education, develop coping skills and provide a venue in which to express themselves freely, without fear of recrimination or judgmental response.

The men, women, spouses, partners, children, siblings or friends, who make up caregiver support groups understand what all caregivers are experiencing. They are now, or have been, “there”. Others, neighbors, relatives or friends, who have not been “there”, do not understand what the 24 hour day, 365 day stress can and does do to the caregiver. They do not see the subtle changes that can occur in a 24 hour period, with one day never being the same as the one before. This constant change in a person for whom you are caring, puts you in the front seat of an emotional roller coaster.

The facilitator of a caregiver support group helps by providing the education and information about resources, but it is the input from the caregivers themselves that is the most valuable part of the group, as they are the real experts! The facilitator also helps to keep discussions moving so that everyone can express themselves.

So what is talked about in these groups? Typical issues include: personal care, anger, guilt, sadness, isolation and loneliness, lack of other's understanding, legal options, residential referrals, in-home help, stages of a particular disease, compassionate physicians, long-range planning, safety, driver's license removal from someone with dementia, finances, day programs, respite, and quality of life issues.

Perhaps, most importantly, groups discuss the potential burnout and illness that can affect caregivers and how to avoid becoming a victim of caregiving. If you are a caregiver, you may be experiencing some of the symptoms of burnout now. The most common are irritability, fatigue, depression, loneliness, guilt, anger, impatience and resentment.



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It is never easy being the caregiver of someone with dementia or any long term illness, but taking the hard step to become part of a support group is the first step in taking care of yourself. Being part of a group can make a significant difference in the physical, psychological and social well being of a caregiver!

Caregiver support groups help take care of the caregiver. Being part of a group helps teach the caregiver that they are not alone, and that there are people who care and understand the tremendous pressures they face each day.

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