

# Caring For Caregivers



Elderhaus Cares for Caregivers

February 2020

## HEART

H-Help, ask for it

E-Expect the positive

A-Accept what is

R-Resist Isolation

T-Tame your fears

### Elderhaus Caregiver Groups

#### Life Transitions Group

Every Monday 1-3 p.m.  
or Every Wednesday 9-11 a.m.  
At Elderhaus

FTD Caregivers Group  
2nd Tuesday Monthly 2:30-4 p.m.  
Daz Bog @ Cherry and Mason

"Why didn't the skeleton want to send any Valentine's Day cards?"  
♥□♥□His  
heart wasn't in it.♥□♥□

## The Heart of Caregiving

February is the month of love, but if you are caring for someone with a dementia it is likely that Valentine's Day will be a day of mixed emotions. You may be "married, but feel like a widow or widower". Memories of what "was" are bittersweet. Love for your partner with dementia feels different, but can still be love.

Acceptance of how your marriage has changed is important. The role of caregiver is a different role from equal partner and you may become more of a "parent" in the relationship. Acceptance of the changes in intimacy, like loss of attraction, can be very painful, but finding other ways to connect, like taking a walk together or reading together, can foster a different kind of intimacy.

Taking one day at a time allows you to focus on the positive. Your commitment as a caregiver can remain strong if you renew it daily and stay in the now. Maintaining mental and physical health is critical to caregivers. We meant it when we said "...in sickness and health, till death do us part", but we didn't expect that we



would slowly lose our spouse to dementia. Love for our spouse changes form as time goes on, but lives on.

## Compassion

Wikipedia says the Latin origin of “compassion” means “co-suffering” and “feeling for another”. We know it when we see it and when we feel it. It is not pity, it is feeling for another that asks us to take action to alleviate pain and suffering. We feel it when our loved one cries because they can’t figure out how to brush their teeth or has an accident because they don’t even know they have to use the restroom. Do we always act with compassion? Certainly not. We get frustrated, tired beyond measure and resent our loved ones need for total care. In spite of occasional negative feelings we repeatedly return to compassion. We give care because we are compassionate caregivers.



## The Practice of Compassion

Webster’s Dictionary defines compassion as : a feeling of wanting to help someone who is sick, hungry, in trouble, etc. Caregiving when the caregiver does not feel compassion is just a cold, mechanical act. Compassion means that the desire to help can override the desire to not get involved or be distracted from personal interests. Compassion flourishes when the heart remains open, eyes continue to see and ears can hear the cry’s of those who need help. Compassion is not romantic love, but it is a form of love that requires action. Caregivers can still feel compassion even when romantic love for their partner has gone. Compassion is the heart of caregiving.

### “ I just need some sleep.”

Family Caregiver Alliance reports the results of a number of studies, 70% of caregivers for people with dementia report sleep problems. 60% get less than 7 hours a night and 10% -20% use alcohol or medication to sleep. Being awakened during the night by the person we are caring for happens to 50 % of caregivers. Often people with dementia have difficulties getting to sleep and staying asleep once they are in bed. It is not possible for a caregiver to stay asleep when a loved one with dementia is up wandering the house, possibly causing harm to themselves or risking safety of others.

In fact, lack of sleep for caregivers is a very common reason for a caregiver to place a loved one in a care facility. Seeking respite care from relatives or friends, or adult day programs like Elderhaus, or hiring professional caregivers may be necessary so that caregivers can get the sleep they need. Without adequate sleep the quality of caregiving is very compromised.

**Elderhaus Adult Day Program, Inc.**  
**6813 S. College Ave. Fort Collins, CO**  
**For info, call Tim or Danita @ 970-221-0406**