



**June
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Caring for Caregivers

A Circle of Caregivers

One caregiver looks at another and knows the road between them is paved with shared experiences and grief. Distance shrinks and “You have arrived at your destination.” In the group, they speak for themselves and for each other. Compassion is multiplied and denial is divided. Caregivers are in shock, there is not enough oxygen getting to their heart, and hope is dropping very low. Caregiver shock is life-threatening, depression, anxiety and coronary problems are just some of the costs of caregiving.

Tears are healing and so is laughter. Bob Hope said laughter “...can transform almost unbearable tears into something bearable, even hopeful.” Caregivers in support groups understand this. Relationships, caregivers caring for each other, bring strength to the group and to individual members. With love and without judgment, members hold each other accountable—“How did the doctor’s appointment go”, What did your daughter say when you asked for her help?”

Those members who are caregiving loved ones with dementia validate each other’s grief and understand how the ambiguous loss of their loved ones, although still living, is one of the most painful kinds of grief.

The strength of the group lies in vulnerability and the trust that grows when everyone’s truth is honored.

Financial Abuse: Who Is Stealing From the Elderly?

Usually when we think of financial abuse of the elderly we think of fraud and scams, but according to the AARP there is another theft that is difficult to discuss: family or friends who steal from loved ones. Bank privacy laws can actually make it difficult for anyone to monitor a loved one’s accounts unless they are named on the account. Unfortunately, joint account holders can divert funds for their own use. Initially intentions are often good, but some caregivers are tempted to begin making small withdrawals or writing small checks for their own needs, and they eventually progress to significant theft. This may happen under the nose of loved ones who have no reason to suspect that a trusted caregiver, maybe a sibling or other relative, is stealing from their elderly loved one.

What can be done to reduce family financial abuse? There are companies which use artificial intelligence to identify changes in financial-activity patterns and then send alerts to vested advocates who can review the activity. The more people who are watching a loved one’s finances the better. Check in frequently. It may be best to get them to sign up for a monitoring service or purchase the service for them.

Theft is by far the most common type of financial elder abuse. The theft of cash, jewelry, art, tools and computers from elders is more frequent than we would think. Consider these preventative steps: The first step in lowering the risk of theft by a caregiver is to carefully select candidates, ask for referrals, call to make sure the referrals are legitimate, and conduct a background check on the caregiver you like. Inventory and photograph valuables like jewelry, art, and collectibles to aid in insurance claims and checking pawn shops. Secure incoming and outgoing mail with a locked mailbox or a rented P.O. Box. Have the bank send duplicate statements. Make sure that handymen and contractors are licensed and bonded and down payments are small. Shred private documents. Remind your loved one to never allow a stranger into the home. Keep an inventory of your loved one’s drugs so it is possible to spot the theft of drugs by a paid or family caregiver. If your loved one has dementia it is especially important to be vigilant, visit often, ask questions and follow these preventative steps.

Dementia Multiplied

Usually when both elderly parents are still living at home, the well spouse becomes the primary caregiver when their spouse needs care. What if both parents have dementia? This does not occur often, but it is not rare. When both parents have dementia, navigating their caregiving needs becomes extremely difficult, especially if one or both is in denial. Their adult children will experience a great deal of angst and frustration. Audrey Miller, in her article, "When both parents have dementia..." suggests questions that need to be addressed: 1. Can they both remain safely at home?; 2. Do they need 24 hour care?; 3. If they need a live-in caregiver is there a bedroom available for the live-in?; 4. Do they need expensive awake overnight care?; 5. Is there technical/video monitoring equipment that can be used?; 6. Could one spouse enter a care facility and the other remain at home with care?; 7. Could they enter a care facility together and if so could they share a room?; 8. What if they need to be separated due to different care needs? With every caregiving issue doubled, it is critical that the caregiver(s) get as much help as is needed. The legal difficulties when demented spouses have named each other as Medical and Financial POA's require a lawyer skilled in elder-care and taking action as soon as possible.

A Special Message From Danita

The years I have spent at Elderhaus focusing on caregiver needs and caregiver support groups have been very rewarding for me. I am grateful to Elderhaus for giving me the chance to focus on caregivers and thankful to all the caregiver heroes I have met. Now it is time for me to model the self-care I keep emphasizing and pursue my dreams and interests outside of Elderhaus. The support groups will continue in good hands and caregiver support will continue to be an important focus at Elderhaus. Thank you and best wishes to all of the Elderhaus family.

My dog licked the crumbs out of my computer keyboard and earned a college degree. Ha!

Why do dogs always race to the door when the doorbell rings? ...it's hardly ever for them. Ha!

My fashion philosophy is, if you're not covered in dog hair, your life is empty. Ha!

Elderhaus is open on a limited basis and will continue to add more services as it is safe to do so. Details are posted on our website elderhaus.org and Facebook page. Support services for all caregivers are available. Contact Tim or Reesa @970-221-0406 for information