

An introduction to the transitional life phase of family caregiver recovery

by Gale Lyman, RN, BSN, HNB-BC

Published Feb 7, 2019 at calmandcentered.info

Does this sound like your story? You have been taking care of your loved one. She may be experiencing dementia, heart disease, a traumatic accident, cancer, or a combination of chronic illness and decreased mobility related to aging. Most of your time, thoughts, and resources have focused on your loved one's needs. Possibly you have given up sleep, friends, or even your job so you could be what's call the 'family caregiver.' You did so willingly, even if unexpectedly, and you would probably do it again.

Now, your loved one has recovered, or perhaps passed on. Either way your life has changed. Not necessarily for the better or for the worse, but definitely changed. You might feel great, or **like millions of other former family caregivers, you might be struggling with the remnants of caregiving challenges**, facing homelessness or unemployment, experiencing your own untreated health issues, and trying to find a new purpose in life. You may also be tired, stressed, depressed, anxious and unsure of what to do next. And yet, everyone expect you to be back to your former self, happy or at least relieved that you are no longer a family caregiver, and ready to take on more responsibility.

What's going on? **It's called recovering from caregiving, and very few people recognized it as the life transition that it is.**

It might help you to recognize just how much has changed for you, and how those changes have impacted you. There are four major challenges faced by former caregivers. (Lyman, 2019)

1. Family Caregiver Risks: Physical, emotional, spiritual and socioeconomic factors

These stressors often begin while you are busy being a family caregiver, but unfortunately don't go away immediately and spontaneously. Risks, also referred to as burdens, might include health concerns like depression, anxiety, and physical injuries sustained while caregiving. They may also include financial troubles and decreased productivity at work.

2. Compassion fatigue

Compassion fatigue happens when you are burned out and feel you have nothing left to give. You might find that you are avoiding needy people, have less compassion for others, and can't bring yourself to help others in need.

3. Major life changes

This is often the least expected challenge, by family caregivers. You may find yourself at loose ends, not having realized that caring for your loved one became your life purpose. You may have to move, perhaps immediately after your loved one dies. When you have time to tend to your personal finances, you may be shocked to see them depleted, requiring significant lifestyle changes or the need to find a job.

4. Lack of supportive relationships

Family conflict and neglected friendships are common side effects of family caregiving. Some caregivers find that their only 'friends' work at their loved one's doctor office, long term care facility, or home care provider and they disappear when caregiving is no longer needed.

Some caregivers cannot relate to any of these challenges, and seem to sail through the after caregiving transition. But others, in their own unique lives, struggle. What is your caregiver recovery experience? Are you undergoing any of these challenges? Becoming aware of them may help. Give yourself a break, don't expect yourself to be 100% and ready for new life challenges, and allow yourself time to heal. Figure out your priorities and approach each challenge with an open mind. Start by coping, caring for yourself, and tending to the priorities. When you are ready for personal growth, seek out a new life purpose. Most importantly, get help wherever you can. If you didn't learn how to ask for help when you were a caregiver, you now have another chance to learn this important lesson.

Resource

Lyman, G. (2019, January 10). Key points pertaining to the transitional life phase of family caregiver recovery [Blog post]. Retrieved from <https://calmandcentered.info>

Wise use of wellness information

The TLC Resource Center, Lyman Training & Consulting, The Lyman Center (TLC) and Gale Lyman provide general and educational information about health and wellness. Always seek the advice of your physician or other qualified health provider about wellness, health and medical problems. Never disregard medical or professional advice, stop medical care, or delay seeking medical care because of something you read on this website or a linked website, or otherwise learned from TLC Resource Center, Lyman Training & Consulting, The Lyman Center (TLC) and Gale Lyman.

TLC Resource Center

www.LymanCenter.com
Info@lymancenter.com

Calming and centering contemplative practices for senior citizens and family caregivers
from Gale Lyman, holistic nurse, freelance writer and guest speaker.

Copyright © 2019 The Lyman Center - All Rights Reserved.