

Avoiding Guilt and Worry in Caregiving

Many years ago, I read a book entitled: *Your Erroneous Zones*, by Wayne Dyer, PhD. The primary message of the book is that we have control over our thoughts, and our thoughts influence our feelings. So, we can regulate our emotions as well.

In particular, the book explores the feelings of guilt and worry. As Dr. Dyer explains, neither guilt nor worry will actually lead to anything constructive. But, they both will take a toll on our emotional, spiritual and physical health.

It seems that most caregivers face frequent periods of guilt and worry. These times often lead to unproductive anguish and turmoil, which can actually cause us to be less effective in our role as caregiver and may lead to a gradual deterioration in our health over time.

Caregivers often feel guilty about something they did or failed to do. This feeling can be summed up in the word enough. "Did I do enough? Did I care enough? Did I spend enough time? Should I have given more?" None of that psychic energy will change what happened yesterday, or a week ago, or a month ago. It will only serve to immobilize the caregiver.

Reflecting on the past, and learning from mistakes is a healthy and necessary part of growth. But, rather than blaming ourselves and feeling hurt, upset or depressed about the past, it might be better to ask ourselves a different set of questions. Who could help me with some of this work? How could I divide up the responsibilities of caregiving differently? What resources are available to me in my community?

Caregivers sometimes worry about what the future holds for the person for whom they provide care and for themselves. "How will their care needs change? Will I be able to adapt? How will I get it all done?" Again, these worries drain us of energy and do nothing to help us in our role as caregiver. Remember these words from Matthew 26:27, "Which of you by worrying can add a moment to your life?"

The nature of chronic illness would suggest that care needs will gradually increase over time. Planning for this inevitability is prudent and healthy. I recommend that caregivers have a heart-to-heart conversation with the person for whom they provide care. Be honest and realistic about what you are able to do, given your personal life circumstances. Do not over commit; set limits. Then, together you can plan how to cover the needs that will likely arise. Remember: the person for whom you care, cares about you, too. They want you to be happy and healthy as well!

So, try to avoid feelings of guilt about the past and worries about the future. Focus instead on the present. Enjoy the moments that you spend with your loved one here and now, sharing stories, smiles and comfort. Blessings to you.

*This article is an adaptation of a blog
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