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Tips for Dealing with Anger

Even in the most loving families and environments, tensions can mount in any caregiving situation. Frustration, anger, and resentment can translate to emotional and physically forceful responses by either party, which are inappropriate under any circumstance.

When caring for a loved one that has physical or mental challenges, there are many more dangers beyond what many people believe is the stereotypical physical, verbal or emotional abuse due to the close nature of the caregiving relationship. Managing anger and possible abuse can be a challenge for all parties concerned. Once anger and frustration become unmanageable, short-term outbursts can many times become more frequent. In many cases the lack of the immediate ability to put distance between the parties involved when tensions rise is of great concern. Many family caregiving situations do not even realize that a once caring relationship has developed into an unhealthy and abusive environment for everyone.

Dealing with Caregiver Anger

A caregiver has the responsibility to ensure the well-being, both physical and mental, of the care recipient, while at the same time managing the household and all of the daily activities of the individual, in addition to maintaining their own sense of well-being. Everyone, including the caregiver and the care recipient, will have bad days, even multiple ones in a row. Putting a smile on your face, providing a cheerful tone, and always saying something positive can be harder some days than others. Competing priorities usually leave the caregiver with a sense of frustration for not being able to accomplish everything. Any number of distractions or disturbances outside the caregiver-care recipient bond can also drive the level of frustration, anger, and resentment through the roof. Regardless of the responsible trigger, the caregiver needs to ensure that the care recipient does not bear the brunt of the negative response.

Caregivers need to have an ongoing self-awareness of their anger or frustrations, and how they are treating their loved one and modify their behavior quickly. Examples include being too rough when assisting with transferring, dressing, and grooming which not only can result in physical harm, but also emotional distress for the individual. Inflicting harsh criticism, continuous shaming, constant complaining, and exhibiting controlling behaviors and actions are also very damaging to the self-esteem and emotional well-being of a care recipient.

Tips for diffusing caregiver anger:

- Step into another room in the house for a few minutes, step outside to the patio, deck or back porch and take some deep breaths.
- Ensure you are getting the proper amount of sleep, taking naps when the care recipient is napping as well if needed.
- Household chores can always wait for another day – do not get stressed out if everything does not get done.
- Call for help if you believe the situation is beyond your control, and you are feeling overwhelmed.
- Call another family member, friend, clergyman, or professional caregiver to talk through your anger. Don't be afraid to express this anger to someone who is supportive.
- Join a caregiver support group or program in your area to learn ways to deal with your anger.

Dealing with Care Recipient Anger

The care recipient may have their fair share of frustrating days, whether it is due to physical or mental deficiencies. The care recipient may physically strike out as a means of communication, or may be verbally assaulting in ways that can be extremely hurtful to the caregiver. Some acts may be as subtle as scratching the caregiver while assisting with dressing, while other acts may be more forceful and straightforward like punching, kicking, throwing food and spitting.

Communication with the care recipient is important to diffuse the situation before it escalates. Here are a few helpful tips:

- Don't continue to elevate your voice to match their tone and volume.
- Don't intimidate them by giving them ultimatums or discounting them by telling them that they are not making sense.

- Affirm their anger. Listen to their concerns and ask questions to let them know you are interested in their concerns, rather than quickly trying to fix it with a response that may not be correct.
- Resist being defensive or angry to the care recipient who is expressing themselves. They are likely angry at the situation and not you.
- Provide a caring, calming, concerned and supportive environment, which may require a considerable amount of patience.
- Review choices with them. They may only see one choice, which is upsetting them, and not considering alternatives that could eliminate the anger.
- Repeat yourself several times if necessary in a soft and caring voice.

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