

## CAREGIVERS HAVE RIGHTS, TOO!

It happens gradually. She needs a little help balancing the checkbook. There are other bills on the counter not getting paid. The layer of ice on roads and sidewalks leaves you nervous about a fall so you stop for her groceries and accompany her to appointments. You notice that her floors are dirty and there is a laundry basket of clothes waiting to be washed. You do more and more for her and soon find yourself making daily phone calls or visits to help. You have become a caregiver. Your mother could not live at home alone without your help.

The next things you notice involve your own life – when is the last time I had lunch with my friends? When did I start eating fast food so often? I used to love going for walks, but how long has it been? And why do I feel so grumpy, angry and frustrated? The answers are enmeshed with your new “job” that you didn’t realize you had.

Caregiving is like another job. You choose to do it and truly want to do it. But when you put your own life and needs on the backburner, you can run into trouble. Caregiving can consume your time, thoughts and energy and it can chip away at your physical and emotional health. But don’t dismay, you can be a healthy caregiver! You have rights as a caregiver and following these rights will keep you healthy and help you give better care to your loved one, too.

For all you caregivers out there, please read and follow these rights. **You have the right to:**

- Take care of yourself without any feelings of guilt. By maintaining your own health, you will be happier, healthier and a better caregiver for your loved one!
- Continue having a life of your own – one that does not include your role as a caregiver. Make it a priority to keep doing the things you love, knowing that you are also doing all you can for your loved one.
- Feel and express the strong emotions that caregiving produces. It is normal to feel anger, fear, loss and depression. Acknowledge these feelings and find someone to talk to about them.
- Refuse feelings of guilt that may be put upon you by your loved one or others. Do not allow yourself to be manipulated by guilt or other negative feelings.
- Accept the positive feelings - appreciation, love, forgiveness, gratitude – bestowed on you by your loved one and others who see your difficult task. Caregiving is hard work and you should feel happy and proud to be a caregiver.
- Seek help from others, whether from friends and relatives or paid help. No one can do it all. Accept help in order to maintain your own life and individuality. You will need this life to return to when your days of being a caregiver ends.

If you need help finding resources for home care services, support groups or other caregiving issues, please call the ADRC at 262-833-8777.