



Caregivers Find They Have Common Bonds

Madison - Whether it is providing daily care to an ill spouse, helping an aging parent recuperate after a stroke, or advocating for services for a child with a disability, caregivers find they have many emotions and experiences in common. A 1997 survey conducted by the national Family Caregivers Association (NCFCA) found that it was not the specific caregiving tasks, the location of the care, or the duration of care needed that bonded caregivers.

Rather, many of the caregivers experienced very similar emotions. Among the most common feelings mentioned by caregivers were:

- Intense sadness, even a sense of loss, felt by caregivers who wish for what the study calls "the miracle of normalcy."
- A sense of isolation or feeling that the family is "living outside the norm" of society. Everyday activities that others seem to do without thinking, such as dressing, toileting, walking, talking, or thinking clearly, can no longer be taken for granted.
- Frustration because those who are not caregivers don't understand, because every task seems to take so much effort, and because people and services that are supposed to have answers often don't.
- Stress because of loss of personal time and concern about the future.

"These common bonds of caregiving can create an innate understanding among caregivers that allows them to understand each other's pain, loss of dreams, and fears for the future," says Mary Brintnall-Peterson, a University of Wisconsin-Extension program specialist on aging.

"However, from these more difficult emotions also comes another, positive emotion that can connect caregivers. That's the shared bond of inner strength and fortitude to go on despite emotional pain. It is the knowledge that caregivers can and do make a difference, that they are making the world a better place, and that they have been tested by fire and survived."

Brintnall-Peterson says caregiver support groups can be a helpful way for caregivers to share their difficult emotions, while gaining strength and confidence in their role as caregivers.

Developed by Mary Brintnall-Peterson, Ph.D., Program Specialist in Aging, University of Wisconsin-Extension. For more information or questions, contact Mary by phone at (608) 262-8083 or by email at: mary.brintnall-peterson@ces.uwex.edu

This publication is distributed through the Wisconsin Alliance for Family Caregiving site at: <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/flp/caregiving/index.html>