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**EPPIA Update: Emotional challenges in caregiving**

Submitted by Karla on August 1, 2009 - 8:00am.

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In today's world, more and more people are finding themselves in the role of a caregiver for a friend or family member. According to the AARP Web site ([www.aarp.org](http://www.aarp.org)), 21 percent of the population provides unpaid care to friends and family age 18 and older. Of this group, 65 percent are female and six in 10 are employed. Many people realize that being a caregiver for a loved one can be a very satisfying and rewarding experience and the chance to make a difference in someone's life. In some situations though, family members may feel that there is no other choice than to step in and help provide care for their loved one. It is simply what is expected of them.

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No matter how you found yourself in your caregiver role, few people are fully prepared for the conflicting emotional challenges that caregiving will place upon them. From joy to sadness, anger, frustration ... even a sense of loss for your loved one's declining health. You may even struggle with your own personal losses while taking care of your loved one: perhaps loss of friends, time for hobbies or even loss of a job. It is not uncommon to have feelings of guilt as you prioritize your attention and energy to the care receiver over other family members or career. All of these new emotions begin to add up along with the extra physical demands of caregiving. The overload can lead to more serious mental health problems such as clinical depression or anxiety disorders.

The National Family Caregiver Alliance recommends the following message to caregivers:

- \* Believe in yourself.
  - \* Protect your health.
  - \* Reach out for help.
- Remember this: Even though it may feel like it on most days, you are not alone. You have sacrificed a lot in your new role and it's OK for you to grieve your losses and allow yourself to dream new dreams. Here are some other important tips:
- \* Take care of yourself by watching for signs of depression and seeking professional help when needed
  - \* Accept help when others offer it . Be specific in telling others how they may help you out.
  - \* Educate yourself on your loved one's illness.
  - \* Seek support from other caregivers and support groups.
  - \* Eat well and exercise.
  - \* Be patient with yourself.
  - \* If you are employed, take advantage of The Family and Medical Leave Act which allows employees to take up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave to care for an ill family member.

\* Utilize online resources such Eden Prairie's own [www.EdenPrairieAging.org](http://www.EdenPrairieAging.org), [www.Caregiver.org](http://www.Caregiver.org) and [www.IHLCaregiver.com](http://www.IHLCaregiver.com) which provides free online tools for scheduling, organizing and receiving help with caring for your loved one.

This is a special journey you are on. It can be a time to surrender intelligently to the situation and move towards a harmonious relationship with being human. Reach out early and often to those around you. It won't always be easy, but hopefully you will be able to one day look back on this time with fondness and realize how many wonderful memories you made.

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Eden Prairie Professionals in Aging is a nonprofit organization based in Eden Prairie. Our diverse member organizations are all committed to the welfare of seniors in our community. Our purpose is to provide networking opportunities for individuals who provide services to elderly persons in Eden Prairie by meeting bimonthly for information exchange and problem solving in our field. For more information on EPPIA and a list of resources regarding activities in Eden Prairie, please visit our Web site at [www.edenprairieaging.org](http://www.edenprairieaging.org).

Submitted by EPPIA members: Heather Reynolds, program manager, [www.AtHomeSolutionsLLC.com](http://www.AtHomeSolutionsLLC.com); Joanne Bartel, Prairie Adult Care Director, 612-741-9163 and Lisa Schmidtke, Independent Home Living, [www.IHLCaregiver.com](http://www.IHLCaregiver.com).

*Jan Rome*  
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