



## Caregiver's Answers, Topics, and Helpful Information

In an effort to continually assist caregivers in their search for pertinent information regarding eldercare, our Family Caregiver Support Coordinator addresses topics of most frequently asked questions via **Caregiver's Answers, Topics and Helpful Information (CATHI)**. Additionally, caregivers are also invited to e-mail individual questions to the Family Caregiver Support Coordinator at [caregiver2@senior-resources-guilford.org](mailto:caregiver2@senior-resources-guilford.org).

### ***Eight Tips to Managing Caregiver Guilt***

Guilt is a common feeling in the world of caregiving. Guilt can propel you to be the best you can be, or it can immobilize you. Caregivers can experience guilt, sadness, and anger and these painful feelings are like any other pain in your body. It's your body's way of saying "pay attention." Just as the pain of a burned finger pulls your hand away from the stove, so, too, guilt guides your actions and can optimize your health.

Most caregivers have a picture of the "Ideal You" with values that you hold and how you relate to yourself and others. Guilt tends to arise when there is a mismatch between your day-to-day choices and the choices the "Ideal You" would have made. The "Ideal You" may be a parent who attends all your kid's soccer games and one afternoon you had taken your loved one to the doctor and missed a game. This might have you feeling like you're falling apart.

You may have needs out of line with this "Ideal You." You might start believing that our own needs are insignificant, compared to the needs of your loved one that you are caring for. You then start feeling guilty when you recognize your own needs. A mother may start questioning herself asking "How can I go out for a walk with my friends when my mother is at home in pain?" (A hint for caregivers: you can give more to your loved one with an open heart when you take care of yourself.)

You may have feelings misaligned with the "Ideal You." Feeling angry about the unfairness of your loved one's illness? You might even feel angry at your loved one for getting sick,

recognizing these feelings can produce a healthy dose of guilt. You might even feel guilty about feeling guilty.

You might even ask yourself, “why did my love one get sick?” Perhaps, if the “Ideal You” acted more often, your loved one would be healthy. What if you served healthier meals? What if you called 911 sooner, or instead of believing when your loved one just said their chest pain was just a “little heartburn”?

If you are prone to guilt, learn techniques to manage your guilt so that guilt serves you rather than imprisons you. Here are eight tips to managing your caregiver guilt:

**1. Recognize the feeling of guilt:** Unrecognized guilt can eat away at you. Find it, name it. Look at the monster under the bed. Identify other feelings, there are usually feelings under the feeling of guilt. Name those, too. For example, say to yourself: “I hate to admit this to myself, but I’m resentful that Dad’s illness changes our lives.” Once you can put it into words, you will have a new perspective. You will also be reminding yourself of how fortunate you are to have what it takes to take care of a loved one.

**2. Be compassionate with yourself:** Cloudy moods, like cloudy days, come and go. There is no one way a caregiver should feel. When you give yourself permission to have any feeling, and recognize that your feelings don’t control your actions, your guilt will subside.

**3. Look for the cause of the guilt:** What is the mismatch between this “Ideal You” and the real you? Do you have an unmet need? Do you need to change your actions so that they align with your values?

**4. Take action:** Meet your needs. Needs are not bad or good; they just are. If you need some alone time, find someone to be with your loved one.

**5. Change your behavior to fit your values:** For example, Susan felt guilty because her friend was in the hospital and she was not able to send a card. Her guilt propelled her to buy some blank cards to make it easier to drop a note the next time.

**6. Ask for help:** You could reach out to a friend and ask, “I am going through hard time, do you have a few minutes just to listen?” Or you could try and hold a family meeting and say, “our lives have been a lot different since grandma got sick. I have been spending more time with her. Could we work together to make a plan, so we can get everything done?” Look at everyone’s strengths and make sure it’s a realistic plan.

**7. Revisit and reinvent the “Ideal You”:** You probably made the best choices based on your resources and knowledge at the time. As you look to the future, you can create a refined vision

of the “Ideal You.” What legacy do you want to leave? What values do you hold dear? Then, when you wake up in the morning and put on your clothes, imagine dressing the “Ideal You.” Let this reinvented “Ideal You” make those moment-to-moment choices create your legacy.

**8. Care for yourself.** Understand that you will be more effective caregiver when you care for yourself first. Loved ones want their caregiver to be healthy and do not expect you to be selfless. As a caregiver, when you care for yourself, you increase and improve your own caring. Yes, guilt is part of caregiving, but this guilt can help you become the caregiver you and your loved one want you to be.

*The information in this article was adapted from Eight Tips to Managing Caregiver Guilt, By Dr. Vicki Rackner, MD, caregiver.com, 2018.*

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***\*If you would like to join our mailing list to learn more about programs and services available to you contact our Family Caregiver Support Coordinator at [caregiver2@senior-resources-guilford.org](mailto:caregiver2@senior-resources-guilford.org)***

For referrals to community organizations in Guilford County that assist older adults and caregivers, contact Senior Resources of Guilford’s SeniorLine at (336) 884-6981 in High Point, all other areas (336) 333-6981 or the Caregiver Support Coordinator, at (336) 373-4816 in Greensboro or (336) 883-3586 in High Point.



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