

When Family Challenges the Job You're Doing as Caregiver

Most people consider it a privilege to care for a loved one in their time of need. In a way it's actually a gift to the caregiver, an opportunity for them to give back to someone who has given so much to them over the years. But the opportunity can prove to be a very challenging experience, made even more so when siblings or children aren't on the same page.

Recently, I had the pleasure of speaking to several audiences of caregivers. Some were children caring for their parents while others were older adults caring for their spouse. We talked through a number of issues that are encountered by caregivers, such as having difficulty asking for help and dealing with the guilt of "am I doing enough". One of the more difficult and hurtful experiences they discussed was when a loved one, family or friend, challenged what they've been doing. They question how they are providing care and they question if they're doing enough.

Shared responsibility does not always mean equal. Many families have multiple members involved in caring for a loved one. Most often some are more involved than others. It may be a result of geography with some siblings in another state or city. Maybe some work a full time job while others are retired and have more availability. Whatever the reason, caring for a loved one is not always an equal division of responsibility.

Typically, this is not where the problem begins. Most often I hear siblings say they understand that they are in a position to carry more of the load, and that's just fine with them. That is until a family

member decides to critique how they're performing the role of caregiver. These new comments and increased concern for their loved one opens the door to conflict.

"If they're so concerned they can just come here and take their turn." "If they think they can do better they're welcome to come and try." "Easy for them to say that, they haven't been living it 24/7 for months." "I'm going to keep my mouth shut and stay focused so I don't create more conflict when there's enough anxiety already."

Do any of these statements ring familiar?

Consider these thoughts:

- Have you become more sensitive to comments made because you're tired, overwhelmed and have difficulty asking for others to step up, even if only for a brief respite?
- Would you hear this comment differently if you were rested or had just come back from a vacation?
- Have you suggested ideas? Even family, who are a distance away, could call at a specific time which would allow you to plan a brief errand or just a few moments of personal time. Or could they fund a few hours of a hired caregiver to provide you respite? Hands-on care is not the only way family can support you.
- If their comments are genuinely challenging what you're doing, instead of holding your silence and letting anger settle in, have you considered taking the opportunity to ask them what they would do differently? That question should not be posed as a challenge, but rather expressed with genuine interest in seeing if

they have a suggestion that could serve everyone well. Sometimes we get so invested in our caregiving that we lose perspective.

- When you take a step back and try not to take it personally, could it be that those who are criticizing your efforts could be feeling guilty themselves about not being able to do more? Maybe they're struggling with the changes they see in your loved one and it comes out in an inappropriate manner. We all process grief and fear differently.

Sometimes I find that those who are most vocal are having the greatest difficulty processing the changes and possible loss of a loved one. It's more about them than about you. But you won't know this if you don't try to engage in conversation.

Need to talk to someone?

I help families through difficult conversations every day. My series of articles about talking to loved ones about life transitions may be helpful as you determine the next steps. If you need help, contact Laureate Cares at 262-832-7113 for a free, no-obligation consultation. We're here to help.

This article is a reprint of a blog posted by Adele Lund, Laureate Group's Director of Community and Business Relations