

## Growing Older And Wiser

### *Being a parent to the parent*

Approximately 33 million Americans, approximately 13% of the total population, is over age 65. By the year 2030, that number is expected to double. The number of Americans over the age of 85 has almost tripled to 4 million from 1960. Together, these numbers show a growing trend in the length of life-expectancy for many Americans. This has created a need to understand how to take care of aging parents, being a parent to the parent.

The financial, social, physical and psychological demands of being a caregiver to an ailing parent can be an overwhelming task, especially since there is no training for being a caregiver except on the job. Being a caregiver is often a sudden responsibility that can cause problems in the caregiver's family. To help relieve some of the problems associated with this responsibility, plan ahead. Many adult children may not want to face the possibility that their parents are aging because it is a sign that they to are growing older, but being prepared can reduce the stress and relieve some of the burdens associated with taking care of parents.

The process can be remarkably good for all members of the family, if it is properly planned and approached with a positive attitude.

Look at the caregiving as an opportunity to interact with family members and learn more about life. Contrary to what most people think, they can learn something from older people. Involve grandchildren, when possible, as well as other family members in the daily activities. Recent research has shown that when older adults participate in their care, it can greatly increase their quality of life by improving emotional and physical well being of the parent.

Let caregiving be an opportunity to return the love and affection that the parent provided in the past. While it is unfortunate that some parents may have missed the opportunity to provide a caring and loving environment for their children, being the caregiver can be a chance to heal old wounds and restore relationships. Realize that the past is the past, live in the here and now.

For more information about caring for aging parents, please contact the SeniorView Resource Center at (800) 662-2790, or the Alabama Council on Aging at (334) 242-5743.

### **Handling the Trauma of Parenting a Parent**

Whenever an event such as a broken hip or loss of mental command occurs to a parent, it is many times the adult child who must take on the role of caring for his/her parent. Here are some ideas on what to do.

**Do not wait.** Investigate all the possibilities for care before an accident or failing health becomes an issue. Explore, with the parent when possible, the options for assisted-living or family arrangements so that everyone is aware of what to expect.

**Seek out support.** Consult social workers and geriatric physicians to ensure that physical and emotional changes are noted early. The support of health care professionals can be especially important when going against the wishes of a mentally declining individual.

**Shop around.** Check out potential locations for care. Examine the locations on multiple days and during different times to ensure proper supervision of other patients as well as the care provided. Whenever possible, get the input of the parent to ease transition.

**Take care of yourself.** Manage stress factors by exercising and eating properly. Learn to seek out the positive sides of the circumstances.

## What do I do now?

### *Dealing with the loss of a loved one*

#### Ways to Help the Bereaved

There are generally five stages of grief that are recognized by most behavioral health care professionals. It is important to note that many people move between stages over a period of time or skip stages altogether. The stages include:

**Denial.** Because of the enormity of the loss of a loved one, some people will simply deny that the loss has even taken place. With this denial comes a feeling of numbness that can last for a few moments to several years.

**Anger.** Once an individual realizes that he/she can no longer deny the loss of his/her loved one, he/she may become very angry. That anger may be turned towards any number of situations or people, even the deceased.

**Bargaining.** An individual may attempt to relive an event to somehow make up for the loss or to do something differently that will bring back his/her loved one.

**Depression.** A sense of hopelessness can begin to envelope the individual when he/she realizes that nothing will bring back his/her loved one.

**Acceptance.** At this point, an individual accepts the loss and begins to move on with his/her life.

#### Understanding the Difference Between Grief & Depression

Whenever most people think about experiencing the loss of a loved one, they immediately think about the emotional effect. There are also potential physical and behavioral changes that can occur during this time.

Grief does not work on a specific timeline; therefore, an individual may experience all the phases of grief several times within the grieving process.

It is important to know that there is a time of grief necessary after the death of a loved one; however, there is a difference between grief and clinical depression. When grief turns into clinical depression, the care of a professional behavioral health care provider is necessary. According to Dr. Alan Wolfelt, there are several key differences, they may include:

#### Extended Grief

- Responds to comfort and support
- Often openly angry
- Relates depressed feelings to loss experienced
- Can still experience moments of enjoyment in life

- May have transient physical complaints
- Expresses guilt over some specific aspect of the loss
- Has temporary impact upon self-esteem

#### Clinical Depression

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- Does not accept support
- Irritable and may complain but does not directly express anger
- Does not relate experiences to a particular life event
- Has chronic physical complaints
- Has generalized feelings of guilt
- Loss of self-esteem is of greater duration

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If you or someone you love is experiencing the symptoms of clinical depression over the loss of a loved one, there is help available. Please contact the SeniorView Resource Center at (800) 662-2490 or the CARELINE at (800) 662-1002 for information and services available to help.