



## The ABCs of Caregiving

by [Maryanne Curran](#)

Throughout our lives, we each perform a variety of different roles. For me, I have been a daughter, sister, student, salesclerk, secretary, coach, and a writer. The one role I thought I would never assume is now the main focus of my life – caregiver

My journey as a caregiver began in 2003. My mother was diagnosed with a rare neurological disease. Her health slowly deteriorated. As it did, I learned more and more about how to properly and lovingly care for her.

When she passed away in 2008, I thought my caregiving duties were over. But the Universe said, “No.” My 83-year-old father got hit with one health issue after another and again I donned my caregiver hat. Because of this hands-on experience, I feel confident in claiming the title of Professional Family Caregiver.

If you’re facing the new role of caregiver, here are some tips to help you succeed in your new position. While many of these tips pertain to caring for a senior citizen, they can be used for other family members as well.

**Ask.** Admitting that you need help caring for your parent is hard. If you are the primary caregiver, ask other family members to contribute some time. Don’t take “No” for an answer. Everyone is busy. But being a caregiver for an ill person is more than one person can handle. All family members need to pitch in where they can.

**Banking.** Visit the bank where your parent does his or her banking. Have your name added to their bank accounts so you may access funds if they are not able to. Be sure to check with a financial advisor about any tax consequences for you.

**Community.** There are many resources in your community. Identify them and use them. Neighbors, friends, and church members are often eager to help, but don’t know what’s needed. In many towns, Meals on Wheels is available to deliver a nutritional meal for your parent.

**Delegate.** As a caregiver, you may think that you have to do everything. Delegate activities of lesser importance to others. It will give you more free time to deal with the important healthcare issues.



**Emotions.** Caregiving is an emotional ride. There will be days of anger, depression, loneliness, anxiety, and more. These feelings are normal given the circumstances. To balance the darker days, there will also be days of laughter, love, and joy. Relish these days.

**Forgiveness.** In the daily stress of caregiving, you’ll have your share of difficult days. Forgive yourself when you’re having a bad day. No one is perfect. Every sunrise marks a new day. Wipe the slate clean and start your day anew.

**Government.** There are a multitude of agencies that can be a great resource for caregivers. Check [www.eldercare.gov](http://www.eldercare.gov) to find an agency near you. If your town has a senior center, that’s also a great place to start. Some states participate in programs that provide a monetary stipend to a family member who is caring for a senior who is ill.

**Home Health Aides.** A good home health aide can be a blessing. If using an agency, make sure they do a background check on new aides. Make a list of things you want the aides to do. You may have many different aides who cover different shifts. Writing a list of their duties will make it easier to transition from one aide to the next.

**Insurance.** Understand what medical insurance your parent has. Find out what benefits he/she is entitled to and what will be the out-of-pocket expenses. A support group is a place where you can share and vent. If you can’t drive to one, there are many online groups. The group members know what you’re going through and can be a great sounding board.

## ABCs *(continued from page 1)*

**Knowledge.** They say that knowledge is power. This is never truer than when dealing with a health crisis. Learn as much as you can about the disease your loved one is facing. It will prepare you and teach you what symptoms to watch for. If it's a progressive illness, you can learn to identify the stages of the illness to assist with your caregiving.

**Legal.** Make sure all your parent's legal documents are up to date. A will, power of attorney, and health care proxy are a must. Consult an attorney to prepare these documents.

**Medications.** You will need to become an expert about the various medications your parent is prescribed. Ask for a 90-day supply of medication. It's often more cost-effective and will save you some trips to the pharmacy. Check with the pharmacist to ensure that any new prescriptions will not affect existing medications.

**Nutrition.** Illness can often change the eating habits of both the person who is ill and his or her caregiver. Make sure you both have healthy, nutritional meals during this journey.

**Organize.** If you were never an organized person, it's a skill you'll need to master quickly. As a caregiver, you'll multitask more than you ever thought you could. The caregiving tasks may seem overwhelming. Just take one at a time and you'll succeed.

**Patience.** They say that patience is a virtue. As a caregiver, this is a necessary attribute to your skill set. Everything you want to do will take more time than you think. Be patient.

**Question.** There are no dumb questions. Don't be afraid to ask doctors, nurses, and other medical personnel any question you have about the health of your parent. Remember, they work for you.

**Respite.** If your family member is sick, they become the center of your family's world. It's vital that you find time for yourself and get a break from your role as a caregiver. No one works 24 hours a day. Make sure to schedule some time to take a walk, get a massage, or even go to a movie.

**Spirituality.** Connect to your spiritual side. Maintaining your faith or finding the faith that you lost is a significant coping mechanism on this caregiving journey. Spiritual leaders will often make visits to your home to provide spiritual guidance to both you and your loved one.

**Talk.** Talk about your feelings about being a caregiver to someone you trust. Talk to your loved one about their feelings about their health. Talking makes any relationship a closer and more loving one.

**Understanding.** As a caregiver, you'll be called upon to provide a deep level of understanding to your loved one. You'll need to evaluate each situation to determine what your parent needs. Are they looking for a shoulder to cry on? Are they in pain? Are they lonely? Is it something more? You'll need to learn to understand the cues so you can help.

**Visiting Nurses.** Visiting nurses are the unsung heroes of the healthcare industry. They save you trips to the emergency room. They can treat and help diagnose a myriad of health problems. They can get through to a doctor immediately. If needed, they are a link to hospice.

**Wishes.** If your loved one is terminal, you must have "the talk" with them. It's not easy, but it's necessary. You must talk about what their final wishes are including funeral arrangements, do not resuscitate instructions or quality of life issues.

**eXercise.** Yes, we're cheating with the spelling here, but it is the best example. We all know the benefits of exercise. As a caregiver, exercise is even more important. You need to maintain your own health as well. Exercise manages stress.

**You.** While this is near the end of our list, YOU should be at the top. You, as a caregiver, will be facing a whole new world of challenges. That makes you a special and loving person. You are providing help to someone who desperately needs it. You rock!

**Zeal.** Like anything done well, it requires commitment to the project. Caregiving is no different. Address your role as a caregiver with zeal. Be an advocate for your loved one.



AUGUST



**B**e present.

**L**et the day flow with grace.

**E**xpect joy. Be positive.

**S**erve with compassion.

**S**peak only kindness.

**I**mpart only love.

**N**ever forget you're not alone.

**G**ive thanks for everything.

**S**ee goodness in others. mary  
davis

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Do you have an email address? Want to receive your newsletters electronically? Please submit your email address to [jferril@thrive-alliance.org](mailto:jferril@thrive-alliance.org) for future correspondence! If you desire a listing of caregiver support groups whether live or virtual please e-mail or call me at 812-399-5854. We also have a Thrive Alliance Caregiver Resources Facebook group. Please e-mail or call if you would like to be a part of the group. If you want removed from the mailings, please let me know as well.



Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



# Summertime Crossword

**Across**

**Down**

- |                                     |  |                                |                              |
|-------------------------------------|--|--------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. Skating on wheels                | 18. Where you build sandcastles        | 2. Kids' summer business       | 17. Gathering spot at night  |
| 4. Classic barbecue food            | 21. Flies high in the summer sky       | 3. Frozen treat on a stick     | 19. Walking in nature        |
| 5. Juicy summer fruit               | 22. Outdoor meal on a blanket          | 6. Seen on the Fourth of July  | 20. Catching fish in a lake  |
| 7. Popular summer sport             | 23. Glows in the dark on summer nights | 8. Grilling outdoors           | 24. Where kids play outdoors |
| 9. Summer rain and lightning        | 25. What you wear to swim              | 10. Sailing on a lake or river | 25. Shade from the sun       |
| 11. Planting flowers and vegetables | 27. Riding waves on a board            | 12. Refreshing summer drink    | 26. Summer break from school |
| 14. Protects your eyes from the sun | 28. Cold and creamy dessert            | 13. Colorful summer insect     |                              |
| 16. Protects your skin from UV rays | 29. Casual beach footwear              | 15. Found on the beach         |                              |



# Managing Caregiver Stress

**Tuesday, August 12**  
**4:00 pm - 5:30 pm**  
**Thrive Alliance**  
**Hukill Building**  
**200 E. Third St.**  
**Seymour**

## Powerful Tools **FOR** Caregivers

Caregiving can be stressful —physically,  
emotionally, and financially.

Join us for a workshop for caregivers to learn  
about self-care strategies and techniques to  
increase relaxation and reduce stress.

Manage the daily stresses you face  
as a caregiver.

Space is limited, so sign up today!



**Program is FREE, but registration  
by August 11 is required.**  
**To register, call 812-372-6918 Ext 2402 or  
email [jferril@thrive-alliance.org](mailto:jferril@thrive-alliance.org)**



# Managing Caregiver Stress

**Monday, August 25  
4:00 to 5:30 p.m.**

**Doug Otto**

**United Way Building  
Second Floor  
Conference Room**

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