



Keeping In Touch

Spring 2003

News For Family Caregivers

by Lynn Cibuzar, LSW, DARTS Service Coordinator

Does Your Family Have a “Complainer?”

Has your loved one always been a complainer? Many aging specialists talk about the “more-so” theory of aging. That is, if you are a complainer as a young person, you will be more so as an older person. Someone’s complaining may simply be more apparent to you because they’re aging.

On the other hand, a negative attitude may not be typical for them. *Many older people suffer real setbacks from the “multiple losses of aging” (several major losses within a short span of time). A typical list might be death of a spouse or close friend, onset of illness, moving from a home to an apartment, and inability to engage in a favorite pastime.* Each of these losses requires a grieving period to return to strong mental health. When the losses pile up, it may be difficult for healthy grieving to take place. The result can be depression, feeling a loss of control, losing confidence in being able to cope, and loss of self-esteem.

When loved ones suffer a series of losses, encourage them to talk about their sadness. Don’t assume the role of cheerleader. Sadness and tears don’t cause depression, but they can help relieve it. And, many senior programs have trained senior volunteers who can help your loved one through a difficult time and help them return to a more cheerful self.

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Baby Boomers Coping Well with Changing Roles

Many assume that people in the “sandwich generation” (Americans between the ages of 45 and 55) must be stressed by the needs of their aging parents and their children. A recent AARP survey of baby boomers asked about their stresses and found that many were “squeezed,” but not overly stressed. This generation is comfortable with, and confident of, its capacity to manage family roles. They welcome involvement in caring for their loved ones, but are cool to the thought of imposing their own future needs on their children. Some of the survey findings include:

- The sandwich generation has a positive outlook and remains hopeful that they will enjoy good health and financial security.
- Most welcome the chance to help care for their parents, and most believe they provide levels of care that exceed their parents’ expectations. Nevertheless, many still feel pangs of guilt over not doing enough.
- Self-confidence and independence color the attitudes of this generation. Even though older boomers are open to caring for their parents, most don’t want their children to feel they must shoulder the same responsibilities.
- A large majority (72%) agrees that helping older family members has brought them closer. Only 50%, however, indicate it makes them more optimistic about their own aging. (Caregiving may force people to confront their own aging.)
- When asked about their own sources of support, these baby boomer caregivers are most likely to mention faith-related sources. Sixty-two percent draw strength from prayer, while 42% have obtained support from religious institutions. Next mentioned are personal relationships, including those with siblings, friends, and other family members. About 20% have turned to government, community groups, or nonprofit organizations for assistance.
- Some do feel the strain. For example, nearly 20% of these caregivers admit that providing care has caused some stress between them and their spouse and between them and their brothers and sisters. A somewhat smaller percentage says caregiving has created friction in relationships with their children or parents.

“Our treatment of both older people and children reflects the value we place on independence and autonomy. We do our best to make our children independent from birth...and the old people we respect are the ones who will fight for their independence.”
Margaret Mead

More on the AARP study can be found at http://www.research.aarp.org/il/in_the_middle_1.html

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If you are dealing with a chronic complainer, take steps to limit how much complaining you'll listen to. They should know if, for example, their complaining is making you avoid contact with them. Decide how you will respond when they begin complaining. One possibility is to tell them you intend to leave (or to hang up the telephone) when the complaining begins. Or you can firmly change the subject.

Setting limits isn't easy, but it's important to your overall relationship with your loved one. They need your love, your support, and sometimes, your willingness to discuss tough issues.

May We Help You?

Family caregivers find many creative and clever ways to experience personal satisfaction and rewards from caregiving. One option is to journal your thoughts by using the *Family Caregiver Journal* developed by the Minnesota Board on Aging.

You can use the journal to plan, organize, or reflect on your personal caregiving experience. You can:

- Keep track of your family member's condition
- Write thoughts and feelings and jot down life events or special moments
- Note things that matter to you and things you are grateful for

The journal's tabbed sections are:

Health	general health and daily care	Thoughts	personal thoughts
Meds	medications and treatments	Calendar	activities and appointments
Life	family lifestyle	Reference	important numbers and resources

If you have Internet access, go to <http://www.mnaging.org/caregiver/information.html> to download the journal. If not, please call DARTS' information and assistance specialist at 651-455-1560 and she will mail you a copy.

From the Caregiver Library

Another Country

by Mary Pipher

Mary Pipher reveals in *Another Country* that the greatest shame for today's elders – most of whom survived the Depression – is not being self-sufficient. Most are stoic about keeping their feelings to themselves, which is why it's so difficult to convince them to accept or even discuss such issues as physical and mental health, finances, eldercare, or living wills. This attitude directly conflicts with the openness of their baby boomer children, who talk frankly about emotions. While a boomer can easily talk with a friend about marriage difficulties, an elder is likely to find it abhorrent to admit such a "weakness."

Pipher cared for her dying mother for a "horrid," guilt-filled year while writing this book, and says she wanted "to help others in my situation feel less alone." She also aims to help each generation understand the other. Any adult struggling with issues with their parents, especially mortality, will find *Another Country* an indispensable source of suggestions and support. (Reviewed on www.amazon.com.)

Another Country is in DARTS' Caregiver Library. Call Alicia, 651-234-2245, to borrow our copy.

Need Some Caregiver Tools?

DARTS' caregiver coaching and counseling service (through ElderCare Partners) includes a kit for caregivers. Each kit contains tips, tools, and words of encouragement to ease the caregiving journey. Call Colleen at 651-234-2262 to request your free kit.



“What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us.”

– Ralph Waldo Emerson