



Caregiver Challenges

Survivor of Past Abuse

Many older adults who need assistance and are living at home receive help from family members who provide kind and supportive care. These family members create loving and nurturing relationships. Even if the older individual has challenging and/or aggressive behaviors due to a medical or mental health condition, family members generally come together to support one another and find resources. Most caregiver support programs and services have been designed for these families.

This brochure is written for caregivers who find themselves caring for an older family member (parent, sibling, grandparent, etc.) who abused them or other family members in the past. Caregivers whose childhood included experiencing or witnessing domestic violence in their home, child abuse, or incest face additional challenges in these situations. Other caregivers may have been affected by other forms of family violence that were not physical such as emotional, verbal or psychological abuse, name calling or belittling.

Caregivers may feel that they have no choice but to care for the older abusive family member. They may be pressured by others to provide care, including family members and health care professionals who may or may not have knowledge of the previous abuse. Some caregivers volunteer to provide care, thinking there will be no abuse, only to find themselves being manipulated or abused by the older abusive family member. Even if the abuse occurred many years ago, when family members re-engage in a closer way, abusive behaviors may begin again. Anger, resentment, anxiety, and fear are common reactions for a caregiver in this position. You might suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). PTSD is a condition resulting from exposure to trauma in your life. Even in situations where the abuse may have happened many years ago, PTSD can cause you to re-experience the trauma or trigger flashbacks, nightmares, extreme startle reactions and significant distress. If this is happening to you, it is important to take care of yourself, establish appropriate boundaries, and give yourself permission to say no to the request to provide care. There are agencies that can help you find another caregiver.



If you are being hurt, you are not alone. Other survivors who are caregivers are hurt by abusive family members while they are providing care. You may be afraid to tell anyone this is happening or be concerned about whether friends, family or professionals will believe you. There are ways to set up a support system for you that includes physical safety and emotional support. (Be aware that some of the individuals you talk to may be required to report some forms of abuse to an elder adults-at-risk agency. This report may trigger a response by that agency and could result in a referral to the criminal justice system. Therefore, before discussing personal information with a professional, ask in advance what information will be shared with others.)

What You Can Do

To help you through this challenging time, you can do the following:

- ◆ Plan for your safety. Think about how you can keep yourself physically safe. Your local domestic violence program can help you.

- ◆ Stay involved with friends, family and others who are safe to talk to about your feelings.
- ◆ Contact a domestic violence program for information about the dynamics of abuse and to learn about other local services. For information about services in your area, call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at (800) 799-SAFE (7233) or (800) 787-3224 TTY (www.ndvh.org).
- ◆ Contact a sexual assault program for information on sexual abuse and to learn about other local services. For information about services in your area, contact Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network at (800) 656-HOPE or www.rainn.org.
- ◆ Seek guidance from your spiritual community.
- ◆ Talk to health care professionals or staff from other helping agencies for support and community options.
- ◆ Consider joining a support group (e.g., caregiver, Alzheimer's disease, domestic abuse or sexual assault).
- ◆ Contact your county/tribal aging unit or aging and disability resource center for information about others who can provide care if you feel you cannot continue or if you need a break. Contact the Wisconsin Bureau of Aging and Disability Resources at (608) 266-2536 or via the web at <http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov/aging/information.htm> if you need help in locating your local aging unit or aging and disability resource center.



- ◆ Stay active in the community.
- ◆ Call 911 or law enforcement if you are being physically hurt or are afraid.

Taking Care of Yourself

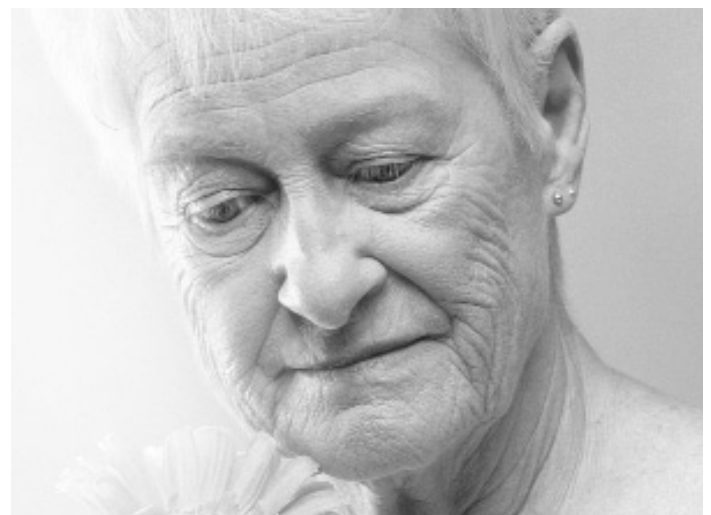
Many family caregivers belong to the "sandwich generation" having both aging parents and children in their lives. Caregiving responsibilities must be balanced with work and other family commitments. Many people care for parents, in-laws, spouses, and relatives for more years than they spend raising children. With multiple demands, there is barely enough time to meet everyone's needs. Many caregivers become exhausted, emotionally stressed, or ill. It is important to take care of yourself so you can be there for others.

People react differently to the responsibility of providing care. Most caregivers provide loving, nurturing care to older persons. Others find that caregiving is very stressful but are not abusive. It is more likely that caregivers will experience physical or emotional symptoms that affect their own health or bodies. This can be described as caregiver distress.

Symptoms could include:

- ◆ Overeating/not eating
- ◆ Self medication/substance abuse
- ◆ Depression
- ◆ Anxiety disorders
- ◆ Social isolation
- ◆ Chronic medical or mental health problems

Stress, anger and resentment can be common reactions. However, if you are frequently feeling the negative effects of caregiving, it may mean you could benefit from some help.





Recognize what triggers these feelings and seek the assistance you need to make things more manageable. There are others in your community who understand and who are able to help.

If you are experiencing the caregiver distress symptoms listed above (or other symptoms you feel are related to your caregiving responsibilities) consider:

- ◆ Talking with someone you feel close to
- ◆ Calling a help/crisis line
- ◆ Talking with your doctor or other health care professional
- ◆ Talking to a counselor or therapist

Remember, if someone is harming, exploiting or trying to control you, abuse is never your fault. You deserve to be treated with dignity and respect. Information, support and services are available—often free of charge. You deserve a peaceful life.

For more information:

Wisconsin Bureau of Aging and Disability Resources at (608) 266-2536
<http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov/aging/information.htm>

Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence at (608) 255-0539 voice or (608) 255-3560 TTY
www.wcadv.org

Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault at (608) 257-1516 voice/TTY
www.wcasa.org

National Domestic Violence Hotline at (800) 799-SAFE (7233) or (800) 787-3224 TTY
www.ndvh.org

Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network at (800) 656-HOPE
www.rainn.org

National Center on Elder Abuse at (202) 898-2586
www.elderabusecenter.org

National Clearinghouse on Abuse in Later Life at (608) 255-0539
www.ncall.us

Not everyone can be a caregiver—it is okay to recognize your limitations and say no.

A publication of the Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services, Division of Long Term Care, produced in collaboration with the National Clearinghouse on Abuse in Later Life (NCALL) – 2007