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FALL 2017



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Questions Parents Ask About Schools: WORKING WITH SCHOOLS AND TEACHERS

Becoming a CAREGIVER

You may be a caregiver and not even realize it. Caregivers are people who look after relatives or friends who, because of a disability, illness or the effects of old age, cannot manage at home without help. Some caregivers are suddenly thrust into a caring role because of an accident or sudden illness, while others have been caring for a number of years.

The care they give could range from shopping once a week to 24-hour continuous care. Many care in their own homes, while others support relatives and friends who live nearby or even miles away.

How You Might Feel

STRESS

Where there is a caring situation, there is an unusual amount of stress, as it usually involves a long-term illness or condition and often a great deal of change to the lives of all involved. Stress is difficult to define, because it affects people in different ways. Symptoms of stress can include exhaustion, difficulty in sleeping, lack of concentration, tension and headaches.

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How I can be more actively involved with my child's school?

- **Attend** back-to-school nights, student exhibitions, and other school events. Get to know the teachers and other school personnel. Listen to their plans, know what they hope to accomplish with their students, and understand why they chose these goals.
- **Attend** parent organization meetings. Voice your hopes and concerns for your child and for the school. Help organize parent-teacher meetings around your interests and those of other parents.
- **Offer** to tutor students. If you are comfortable with technology, volunteer to be a computer tutor for both students and teachers, or ask if there are other ways that you can help the school to use technology.
- **Offer** to help in the office or the cafeteria or to chaperone field trips and other outside events.
- **Agree** to serve on parent and community advisory groups to your school. They may consider everything from school policies and programs to the kinds of parent involvement activities the school plans.
- **Work** in a parent resource center or help start one. In these school centers, parents may gather informally, borrow materials on parenting and children's schoolwork, and get information about community services.
- **If** you are unable to volunteer in the school, look for ways to help at home: Call other parents to tell them about school-related activities, edit the school newsletter, or make educational materials for teachers. If you are bilingual, help translate school materials or interpret for non-English speaking parents in your school.

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ISOLATION

Caregivers can feel very isolated and think that no one else understands how they think or feel. Some people don't like to talk about their feelings, especially about feeling bad. Many don't or won't admit to it, partly because to feel, for example, angry or resentful seems unacceptable.

GUILT

Many caregivers feel guilty because they never feel they are doing things right or because they can't change the world for the person they love. Some feel guilty for taking time off from caring, or because they can no longer cope and are considering their relative or friend going into a home. Perhaps more than any other feeling, guilt is the one that can stop your doing what you should, both for the person you care for and for yourself. If you do things not because they are right in themselves but because they will ease your sense of guilt, you may well find yourself going in the wrong direction. Many caregivers have said that once relieved of a 24-hour caring responsibility, they were able to recover a relationship damaged by the stresses of caring.

RESENTMENT

It is not unusual for caregivers to feel resentful because of what they have to do and because of what they are prevented from doing. These feelings can often lead a caregiver to feel resentful toward the person they care for. Some caregivers are brought face-to-face with how they are feeling when they find themselves shouting at or actually hitting the person they care for. Caregivers need to find some safe way of letting their anger out.

GRIEF AND LOSS

When someone close to you dies, you expect to be saddened, and you know what you feel is grief. However, grief can also come from seeing a person you love changed by illness or disability. Often this means a change in the relationship. For example, a person whom you have always depended on is now dependent on you, and these feelings can put a lot of strain on a relationship.

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When parents get involved in their children's education, the children do better in school, are better behaved, have more positive attitudes toward school, and grow up to be more successful in life.

What can I do to help make sure that my child's school is safe and drug-free?

- **Review** school discipline policies with your child. Make sure that your child knows what behaviors you expect of him or her in school.
- **Work** with the school to develop a plan to handle safety and drug problems, such as drug education and violence prevention programs. Make sure the school has clear consequences for students who break school rules.
- **Get** to know your child's friends and their parents. Make sure their attitude about drugs is compatible with yours. If not, encourage your child to find new friends.

U.S. Department of Education, Office of Communications and Outreach. (Revised 2005, August 26). In *Questions parents ask about schools*. Retrieved October 25, 2016, from <http://www2.ed.gov/>

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COPING WITH YOUR FEELINGS

Talking to others about the way you feel is very helpful. Bad feelings that are bottled up tend to become worse, but not everybody finds talking about their feelings easy; a lot depends on finding the right people to talk with. Sometimes it is possible to share a great deal with the person you care for, and vice versa. Honesty between you can help you both.

For some caregivers, it's impossible to share feelings with the person they care for, so they need someone else. Joining a caregivers' support group, where you can share your feelings with others in a similar situation, can be helpful. If you do not feel comfortable going to a group, then one-to-one counseling, which involves talking and sharing your feelings with a trained person, may be more appropriate. The counselor will not judge you or tell you what to do, but will help you think about yourself, your relationship, your life and other relationships in a way that you may not have thought of before. Sometimes talking to other family members can be beneficial, especially if they are unaware of how you are feeling. They may offer more practical help

and support to give you a break. The person you care for may also need to talk to someone else about their feelings. Perhaps a health or social worker, or someone with the same illness or disability, can be of help.

Another way of coping when you feel under stress or anxious is learning some simple relaxation techniques:

- Take a few deep breaths to calm yourself and become aware of your breathing.
- Stretch your arms and neck to loosen up.
- Sit straight in a comfortable chair and place your feet flat on the floor. Take a few minutes to rest quietly.

TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF

Try to put your own needs first for a change. Caregivers often don't look after their own health. Remember to eat well-balanced meals, take some regular exercise, and try to make time to relax or follow your own interests. Don't lose touch with your friends; try to strengthen the relationships and friendships that are important to you.

REMEMBER THE POSITIVES.

There are many good feelings that come out of caring. If you can find a way of coping with negative feelings and helping yourself get over them as much as possible, then good feelings might last longer and come to the surface more often. Think about what you have in the relationship rather than what you don't have or have lost. You can only build on what's there and what's possible. There will be things you can no longer do together, so try to find something you can both enjoy. Also, you both need some sort of independence and time away from each other.

Remember, if some of your own personal needs are met, you can be stronger and cope better with your relationship with the person for whom you care.

Workplace Options (Revised 2017, April). *Becoming a caregiver*.
 London: Author.

Defend Yourself AGAINST GERMS

Doing a few simple things can help protect you from infection:

- Avoid contact with people who have a cold or flu.
- Get plenty of rest.
- Exercise daily.
- Visit your doctor and dentist for regular checkups.
- Brush your teeth after meals and before going to bed.
- Keep up with immunizations.
- Eat a balanced diet with plenty of grains, vegetables and fruits; limit fat, cholesterol, sugar and salt.

Germs love moist kitchen items with food particles on them, such as dish rags, sponges and brushes. There are several things you can do to keep such items clean, safe and fresh smelling.

Each time you use these items do the following:

- Rinse them with hot water and place them in a well-ventilated area to dry.
- Put them in a microwave for 30 seconds or in a dishwasher.
- Wash or soak them in a bleach solution weekly.
- Discard old items.

To make your own inexpensive disinfectant, add a half-cup (about 120 ml) of household bleach to 1 gallon (about 4 liters) of water. After spraying a surface with the solution, allow the disinfectant to stand for a few minutes before wiping it dry with a clean cloth. This solution can be used in the kitchen and bathroom to kill germs. Just spray toilets, faucets, handles, showers, tubs, sinks, counters and cutting boards. (Here are a few words of caution: Don't mix chlorine bleach with household cleaners containing ammonia. Extremely dangerous fumes can result.)

Dangerous bacteria and E. coli (*Escherichia coli*) are found in many clothes-washing machines. Forms of harmful bacteria can survive the cold-water wash



and short dryer cycles. The answer to this problem is longer dryer cycles, adding bleach to the wash if possible, or running an empty washer through a cycle with bleach added.

Avoid food contamination.

If you prepare meat on a cutting board, clean it thoroughly before you chop vegetables on it, or you'll spread bacteria. Be sure to wash your hands with soap and water after handling raw meat.

To reduce the risk of food poisoning, do the following:

- Don't buy outdated food, packaged food with a broken seal, or bulging cans.
- Don't eat food that has a foul or unusual odor or taste.
- Refrigerate meat, and use it within a day or two of purchase.
- Keep frozen foods in the freezer until they're ready to be thawed and cooked. Don't refreeze partially thawed meats.
- Keep counters, cutting boards and utensils clean. Always clean a cutting board or utensil thoroughly after using it to cut raw meat.
- Don't leave cooked food out to cool. Promptly refrigerate uneaten food.
- Don't consume undercooked ground beef, raw oysters, unpasteurized milk (pasteurization is a process that slows microbial growth in foods), or raw or undercooked eggs.

Teach your children.

Set an example. Start as early as you can. Let your children see you washing your hands at appropriate times so they will realize how important it is to fight germs. You might even consider making handwashing a group activity or a game. With pump dispensers available, the process becomes a lot easier for everyone.

Soha, C. (Reviewed 2013). *Defend yourself against germs*. London: Workplace Options.



Learn to DISCONNECT

“Never go to excess, but let moderation be your guide.”

— MARCUS TULLIUS CICERO

Sage advice when it comes to technology, screen time and multitasking. Continuously being connected without a break can cause anxiety and may inhibit deep thought. A study from the University of Michigan found that multitasking heavily can fatigue the brain, which causes it to lose the ability to focus. Your brain needs a rest from the multitasking.¹ Some recent imaging studies have found that major cross sections of the brain become surprisingly active during downtime.² Just as plugging in and logging on is a habit, so should be taking a break from it. If you are not accustomed to breaking the plugged-in habit, it may take some diligent practice and rewiring on your part. Here are some suggestions for making the break.

- Challenge yourself to the 20-20-20 rule. After 20 minutes of computer use, look at something 20 feet away for 20 seconds.³
- Say no to multitasking, and allow yourself to do one thing at a time. Read a magazine, talk on the phone, walk to a co-worker's cube to ask a question instead of instant messaging or emailing.
- Change your environment by going on vacation and making it technology free. It may result in a level of relaxation and free-flowing ideas that you never imagined possible.²

- Be a part of nature. Go where mobile phones don't work, where there is no Internet or where it is forbidden. For example, visit the ocean or a cave in the mountains, or take a class.
- Start slowly. Create time each day, say 30 to 60 minutes, for no interruptions. For example, turn off technology an hour before bed or right before working out; try driving to work with no radio and no mobile phone.
- Include the whole family. Limit children's time on technology. Declare a TV Turnoff Week, with small prizes for contestants at the end of each day and the week.
- Practice mapping a destination, instead of using the GPS.
- Go for a walk or jog without headphones; engage another person to go with you.
- Turn off notifications so you are not tempted to plug in.⁴
- Set aside time for social networking.⁴
- Move apps away from your home screen to avoid constant interruptions.⁴

Feel the freedom of single tasking. This means being comfortable working on one thing at a time, which helps sharpen focus and produce a higher quality, uninterrupted output. Balance is the key. While it is vitally important to be plugged in sometimes, it is equally important to recognize that there is a world beyond the screens surrounding you.

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