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CARING FOR THE CAREGIVER

A *Caregiver* is defined as any person who assists a disabled individual of any age:

- Can be with *simple tasks* like cooking, shopping, transportation, housecleaning, bill paying, etc...
- Can also include *major tasks and responsibility*, such as feeding, bathing, transferring, dressing, and providing 24-hour supervision
- Can be a paid individual, family member or friend

A *paid Caregiver* is going to have less of an emotional attachment; this can be both an advantage and disadvantage.

- More objective, less emotional, less stress, no prior relationship
- Less dependable, expensive, hard to find, less committed

Family Caregivers: Parent, child, sibling, relative

Emotional involvement: Stress, time, money, memory of prior relationship, change in roles, inability to work, feelings about injury/illness, full-time commitment, heavy physical demands

REMEMBER: "If the Caregiver does not take care of him- or herself, there will be two sick people!"

From *Take Your Oxygen First* by Leeza Gibbons

Recognize the importance and value of *good self-care*:

- Get out every day, good nutrition, exercise, counseling, spiritual support, support groups, good peer/family support system, sleep, allowing others to help, recognizing that you can't do it all
- *Accept imperfection:* You cannot have perfect situation, cannot know everything about medical issues, cannot control person's mood or motivation level, cannot control course of illness
- Maintain realistic expectations; accept your limitations
- Maintain some normal home environment
- Maintain relationships: Spouse, children, friends, family
- Avoid isolation
- Accept that you cannot control every facet of the person's life
- Pay close attention to *your own mood:* Depression, anxiety, isolation, impatient, memory loss
- The brain injury happened to the *whole family:* Everyone in the family system is affected
- *Take breaks:* Days off, weekends away, family vacations, use paid caregivers if needed or respite care
- *Acknowledge your feelings:* Resentment, frustration, overwhelmed, anger, stress
- Know when to raise the flag. (*I have to get help:* personal or professional, medical intervention, paid help, family, etc...)
- Appropriate use of medications: To control behavior, mood.
- Acknowledge your own Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD): Memories of the accident/illness; hospitalization; ICU; near-death experience; recovery periods.

PTSD Symptoms:

- Anxiety
- Poor sleep
- Frequent nightmares
- Difficulty knowing what is the present and what is a memory from the past
- Reliving trauma
- Depression, fears, frequent and unexplained changes in mood and behaviors

The greater the role of the Caregiver, the greater the impact on his or her own physical, emotional, and mental health.