

# Catholic Caregivers

*'Caregiving is pro-life!'*

## Finding Respite Care

Human beings weren't created to work nonstop seven days a week, fifty-two weeks a year. To be responsible for someone else twenty-four hours a day. Our bodies and our minds simply can't maintain that grueling schedule. But in many ways, that's exactly what many primary caregivers try to do. And it's not good for them or for the people in their care.

"Respite care" is a term that's becoming more common. It means a break for someone who is taking care of an ill person, a rest for the person primarily responsible for the well-being of another. In some instances, it's a mother taking care of her child who has special needs; in others, it's an adult child and a sick parent. In still others, it's a person taking care of his or her ill spouse.

No matter what the particular circumstances may be, the basic truth is the same: A primary caregiver needs to take breaks or soon will burn out, soon will be unable to take care of anyone, including himself or herself.

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These are some points to consider:

- Caregiving is a complicated experience. It's physically and emotionally draining. There's a tremendous sense of responsibility coupled with strong feelings of guilt: I'm not doing enough. I'm not doing this well. Sometimes I don't want to do this and I wish someone else would.

Without a break, without some type of respite care, anger may surface, and with it an increased risk of physical and verbal abuse which should not be tolerated. If abuse is happening already, it's a clear indication respite care is not only needed, but is overdue.

- Respite care does not mean a week off every six months or a free weekend every few months (although those types of breaks are also very helpful and healthy). It's several hours, perhaps once or twice a week, away from the situation with someone else assuming the role of caregiver. But often that's more easily said than done.

It can be hard for you, a primary caregiver, to allow someone else to do your job, even for a short while. Then, too, others—including family members—may not understand why you need to get away. And the person in your care may not understand either. He or she may add to your guilt by apologizing for being such a "burden."

- Don't be surprised if you do feel guilty when you're taking a break. If you blame yourself because you need to get away for a time. If you feel bad because in some ways you might not want to go back.

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You need to remember respite care will help you be a better caregiver. Taking that short step back from the immediate situation will help you see it better. It will give you a moment to catch your breath.

- Remember, too, that the break is for you. Don't fill the time running errands for the person in your care, going grocery shopping, getting the car fixed, and so on. Do something for you.

Have lunch with a friend. Check out a support group for others facing the same situation you are. Go bowling. Play a round of golf. See a movie. Visit the library. Sit in a coffee shop and read the newspaper. Do what you used to like to do but no longer have the time for.

- To find someone to help you with respite care, check with the local Catholic social service agency. Ask at the parish. Call "Senior Information and Assistance."

And keep in mind that there may be state money available to cover the cost of respite care *even for people who are not considered low-income.*

One final point. Perhaps you are not a primary caregiver but your spouse or sibling is. Remember, it can be very difficult for people in that position to say "I need some time off." They may be waiting for a push from you to begin to take those vital breaks. Be gentle, be loving, be firm, as you help them see what a difference respite care can make. □

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You're not alone! Members of the **Friends of St. John the Caregiver** are *praying for you and your loved one every day!* Find out more at [www.FSJC.org](http://www.FSJC.org) or P.O. Box 320, Mountlake Terrace, WA 98043.

Spirituality, information and resources for Catholic caregivers are available at [www.YourAgingParent.com](http://www.YourAgingParent.com), a program of the Friends of St. John the Caregiver.

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