The Whole of You: Balancing Identity

The Caregiver's Identity Crisis

The Challenges of Losing Oneself in Caregiving

Maureen Feldman, CCHT

Consultant and Director of the Social Isolation Impact Project at MPTF
Caring is Infinite

"To love someone deeply doesn’t mean abandoning yourself in the process."

Caregiver Statistics

- More than **65 million people, 29% of the U.S. population**, provide care for a chronically ill, disabled, or aged family member or friend
- One-quarter of caregivers are "**sandwich generation**" caregivers, meaning they care for both an aging parent and a child under
- **About two-thirds of dementia caregivers are women**, and about one-third are 65 or older

On average, caregivers spend:

- **13 days each month** on tasks such as shopping, food preparation, housekeeping, laundry, transportation, and giving medication
- **6 days per month** on feeding, dressing, grooming, walking, bathing, and assistance toileting
- **13 hours per month researching care services** or information on disease, coordinating physician visits or managing financial matters

Questions to Ask Yourself

Do I feel selfish when prioritizing my needs?

Does thinking about my own needs feel frightening?

If yes, Why?

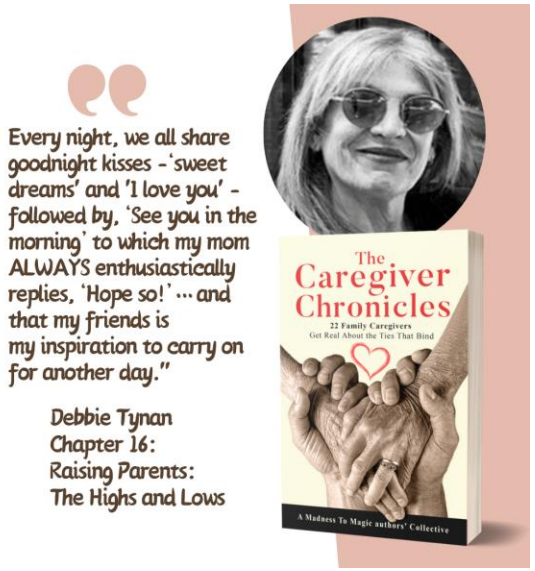
Is it hard for me to ask for help or express my needs?

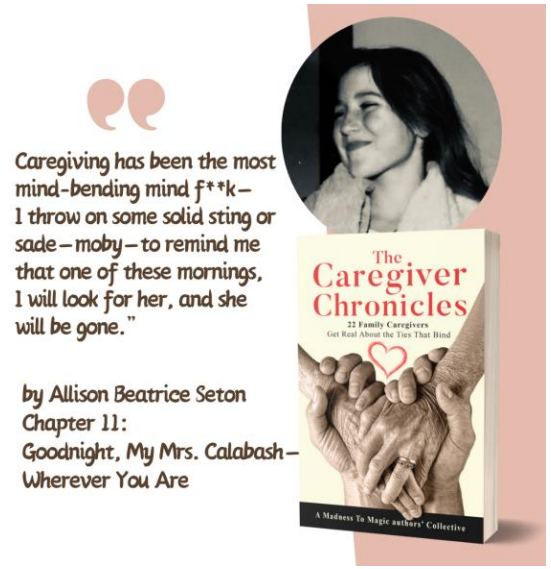
Do I feel the need to prove my worth to my care recipient? Does this lead me to overdo things?

Let’s hear from our Family Caregiver Authors.

Debbie

Allison





Share Your Answers in Chat

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Self-Care is Not Selfish

“You can't pour from an empty cup. Take care of yourself first, for your own sake.”

- The first task in removing personal barriers to self-care is to identify what is in your way.
- Taking care of yourself isn’t just about maintaining your ability to care for others — **it’s about valuing yourself as an individual**.
- You have the right to self-care simply because you’re human, **not just because it makes you a better caregiver.**

Memory Impairment Complicates Emotions

Grieving the gradual loss of who the person used to be while continuing \to care for them can be emotionally exhausting.

- **Balancing expectations:**
  Looking for meaning in small connections can help sustain your emotional health.

  Look for joy in small gestures like holding hands or simply sitting together in silence.

Caregiver's Identity Crisis

Blurred lines between caring for someone else and caring for **yourself.**

Focusing entirely on another's needs, makes it easy to forget your own identity—

what makes you, *you*.

Common emotions:

Guilt: Feeling like you should always be available, never asking for time for yourself.

Anger/Frustration: Feeling resentment for the sacrifices you've made or frustration when your needs are neglected.

Confusion: Struggling to see where your caregiving responsibilities end and your personal boundaries begin.

Reframing Guilt in Caregiving

Your well-being is just as important

- **Shift from:** *"I'm not doing enough."*
- **To:** *"I am doing what I can, and my needs are equally valid."*

- **Give yourself permission to prioritize:** It's okay to want and take time for yourself, not just to avoid burnout, **but because you deserve self-care**

- ***There is no benefit in neglecting your own needs to meet theirs***

ASK FOR HELP

- **"I don’t have a lot of breaks during the week—**could you stop by for an hour to keep [loved one] company?"
- **“I could use some support with ___."** Be specific about the task. For instance, “Would you be able to pick up a few groceries or help with errands once a week? It would mean so much to me.”
- **“Would you mind checking in with me every so often?"** This simple request helps build a small support system without asking for too much upfront. Sometimes a quick message or phone call can make a big difference.
- **"Would you be comfortable sitting with [my loved one] occasionally, even for a short time?" "**If you’re available, could we set up a regular check-in? Even a quick text can help me feel connected.“
- **"I’m a full-time caregiver, and it’s hard for me to get a break.** Would you be willing to join me for coffee sometime or maybe come by for a quick visit?"

Caregiving can be overwhelming, but finding moments of joy, such as a shared laugh or a quiet connection, can bring light to difficult days

Finding Joy in the Little Things- **Practical Self-Care Strategies**

Small, daily self-care rituals:

- Start with small, manageable steps.
- 20 minutes to focus on an activity you love will remind you that your interests still matter.
    - **Mindfulness moments:** Dedicate 5 minutes in the morning to breathe deeply, meditate, or sit in silence.
    - **Exercise:** Even a short walk outside can clear your mind and reduce stress.
    - **Creative expression:** Even a few moments engaging in a hobby you love—whether it's journaling, drawing, or knitting, music or dance is good for your soul
    - **Social connection:** Call a friend or meet for coffee. Maintaining social bonds is critical to keeping your own identity alive.

Self-Care Can Take Many Forms

Sustainable Caregiving

Reframe self-care as part of the caregiving role. Just as you'd plan meals and rest for the care recipient, you should plan them for yourself.

Replace "If I take time for myself, I'm neglecting them" with "When I take time for myself, I'm replenishing my ability to support them."

Give Yourself Grace When Boundaries are Tested

Forgive yourself for moments of frustration, resentment, or exhaustion. Caregiving for someone with dementia, especially, can be incredibly challenging, and guilt only adds weight to an already difficult task.

Practice gratitude for your efforts instead of guilt over perceived shortcomings. Each day, **remind yourself of the things you did, not just the things you couldn't do.**

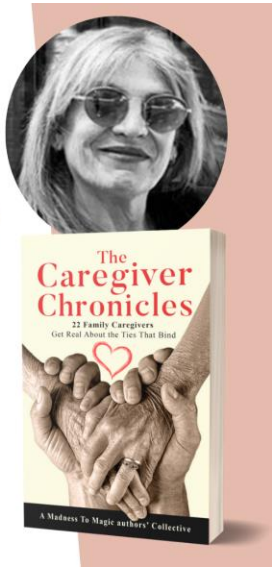
TYPE IN THE CHAT:

What's one way you might incorporate more balancing of identity into your life?

Caregiver Authors...?

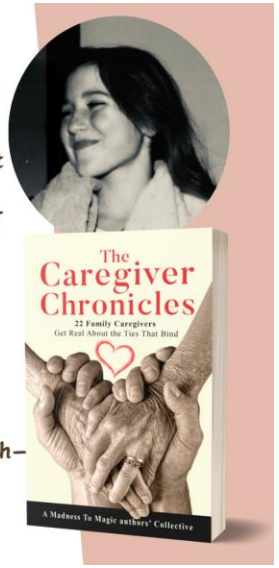
"Every night, we all share goodnight kisses - 'sweet dreams' and 'I love you' - followed by, 'See you in the morning' to which my mom ALWAYS enthusiastically replies, 'Hope so!' ... and that my friends is my inspiration to carry on for another day."

Debbie Tynan
Chapter 16:
Raising Parents:
The Highs and Lows



"Caregiving has been the most mind-bending mind f**k— I throw on some solid sting or sade—moby—to remind me that one of these mornings, I will look for her, and she will be gone."

by Allison Beatrice Seton
Chapter 11:
Goodnight, My Mrs. Calabash—
Wherever You Are



Key Takeaways

"You are not just a caregiver. You are a whole person with dreams, needs, and a right to take care of yourself."

- Caregiving does not have to mean losing yourself.
- Balancing your own self-care with caregiving **is essential**—not just to be a better caregiver, but because you are worthy of that care.
- By acknowledging emotions like guilt, anger, and confusion, you can create space for your own needs while caring for others.
- **Social connection is critical to your own health.** Don’t underestimate the power of relationships in restoring your emotional balance.

QUESTIONS?

Contact:
Maureen Feldman, CCHT
Consultant and Director of the Social Isolation Impact Project at MPTF
Maureen.feldman@mptf.com
818-693-8004
www.social-connection.org