

Looking After Caregivers

'When confronted with people in grief a caregiver will often become aware of their own limitations, vulnerabilities and fears.'

In the demanding and rewarding profession of assisting people, we may fall into the trap of 'being there' for everyone who we believe needs our help. This is all very well if we have been able to identify our own personal time and space. What happens, all too often, is the caregiver may move from one crisis to another without taking stock of their own needs.

BURNOUT

If we don't learn how to handle feelings, we become candidates for burnout. We think all is well, and one day we wake up and there is nothing left.

The following are some of the signs to watch for:

- A progressive loss of ideals. We begin to think everyone is taking advantage of us. There is a real lack of satisfaction in what we do, nothing seems to please us and we find fault where we never even looked before.
- A progressive loss of purpose. We begin to just go through the motions, there is a feeling of heaviness and depression. The depression that comes with burnout produces a sense of no feeling at all. We become emotionally flat.
- A progressive loss of humour. We become more and more irritable. Change begins to bother and threaten us. Nothing is funny anymore.
- A progressive loss of energy. We are tired all the time. No matter how much rest, we can't seem to get any energy.
- A progressive loss of morals. We start to justify things we say and do which we would never have dreamt of before.
- Burnout is the reason we find support systems and places where we can deal with our feelings and let go of some pain.

LOOKING AFTER CAREGIVERS

- Many caregivers know how to give, but do not know how to receive.
- We know how to help, but can't let anyone help us.
- Think about how the following can apply in your life.
- Talk and debrief to someone you trust, on a regular basis.
- Never feel guilty for taking adequate rest during the day, holidays or days off. You owe it to yourself.
- Be realistic with yourself, your family and friends. You also need people close to you who are concerned with your well-being.
- Always remember to balance your emotional involvement in your work with something that relaxes you.
- Find something you are passionate about and DO it.