

Seek resources for caregiving

Some of us become caregivers because we have chosen that career path, but many of us become caregivers because someone needs us.

That someone may be a parent, a spouse, a child, a friend or neighbor.

I recently read an article titled “Passages in Caregiving,” and there was a particular piece that talked about caregiving being like walking a labyrinth, where you come to sharp twists and turns.

I never thought about a labyrinth relating to caregiving, but it really did make a lot of sense. With a labyrinth, there is a well-defined path that will eventually lead us to the center and back out.

Of course, just like caregiving, the path is not visible or predictable, and as the article states, “That reflects our journey as caregivers.”

Safety is always a caregiver's No. 1 priority. When someone is caring for a person suffering from dementia, there seem to be extra concerns about wandering. Many people with dementia become wanderers, especially in the middle stages.

Knowing an individual's personality and prior lifestyle will help caregivers address this issue. From doctors prescribing medications to neighbors being on the lookout, resources are available.

It is impossible for a caregiver to provide 24-hour supervision, and caregivers should not be embarrassed to ask for help. The Alzheimer's Foundation of America offers some practical tips to keep a wanderer safe:

1. Reduce hazards. Throw rugs and extension cords are both tripping risks. Gates at stairwells and nightlights offer fall prevention.
2. Having a “safe” zone for walking and exploration offers a loved one a place for exercise and also instills a sense of freedom he may have lost. A fenced backyard or patio is a good option.
3. Reduce environmental stimuli like loud music or overcrowding, which might initiate wandering.
4. Set a daily routine that includes recreational activities.
5. Hide essential items such as coats, keys, wallets and shoes that may spark a desire to leave home.
6. Another consideration to increase safety is camouflage. A coat of paint, curtains or some wallpaper can cover a door and blend it with the surrounding of a wall.



Center Stage

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It is difficult for caregivers to not feel as if they are locking down their loved ones, but the repercussions can be a lost person or even worse. Often, wandering occurs for no other reason than mere confusion — the challenge for your loved ones is the inability to communicate where they are, whom they are with, and where to go next.

Wandering is a serious side effect of dementia.

To be a good caregiver, you must care for yourself. Being mentally and physically healthy, despite the demands on your time and energy, should be a priority. If you are unable to function, who will care for your loved one?

Give yourself permission to get help and rest time for yourself. Preventing burnout is the key, and the Family Caregiver Program along with other Senior Center Programs, can help you be a great caregiver while caring for yourself as well.

The Family Caregiver Support Group meets each Monday at 10 a.m. and 5:30 p.m. This group brings together caregivers, family members or friends on a regular basis.

The Family Caregiver Program can help you with respite to give you time away for yourself. We can provide some respite in your home, or you may choose to use our Day Break program. Day Break provides a safe, fun and friendly environment for your loved one while you “take a break.”

Please stop in or call me and let us help you with your caregiving responsibilities. To read the full article that I referenced above, visit careadvantage@alzfdn.org or stop by the Senior Center and pick up a copy of the article.

Just as with the labyrinth, everyone's journey may be different. You may follow a path and end up at the beginning many times.

But the goal of the labyrinth is to provide an unambiguous route to the center that is not designed to be difficult to navigate. In caregiving the route is not intended to be difficult — it just depends on your willingness to seek the resources available to you.

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Center Stage is written by friends of the Senior Center for the Sheridan community. It is a collection of insights and stories related to living well at every age.