



March, 2015

Some things simply shouldn't be said.

When they come from people who don't know what someone else is going through, even well-intentioned comments and questions can be frustrating and hurtful.

Cindy Laverty, caregiver coach, radio talk show host, and author of, "Caregiving: Eldercare Made Clear and Simple," offers examples of phrases that can leave caregivers thinking, "Did she really just say that?"

1. **"Why are you having such a hard time being a caregiver?"** Usually voiced by someone who has never been a caregiver for an elderly loved one, this question can be very difficult for a caregiver to hear. As Laverty points out, it effectively takes their role of providing care for a loved one, and diminishes it.
2. **"Gosh...we haven't seen you in such a long time. Why don't you get out more?"** Though it probably comes from a place of love, Laverty points out that this can be an unproductive way to express concern for a friend or family member who is a caregiver. "The truth is that most caregivers do need to get out more, but this is an insensitive way of saying it," she says.
3. **"You look really tired. Are you making sure to take care of yourself?"** Caregivers generally have a good reason for looking tired and haggard—because they are. "The biggest issue for caregivers is that they tend to sacrifice personal care—it's the first thing that goes," Laverty says. Caregivers look tired because they are not getting enough sleep, they spend their nights worrying and making sure their loved one doesn't wander. But, that doesn't mean that they appreciate having that fact pointed out to them.
4. **"Caregiving seems like a burden. You shouldn't have to sacrifice your life for your mother's."** Caregiving is hard. That's why so many people, both caregivers and non-caregivers alike, refer to it as a 'burden.' But, according to Laverty, when a friend or family member likens caregiving to a burden, what they're really telling the caregiver is that they aren't handling the situation properly and that this isn't what they should be doing with their life. "Caregivers get into their role because they started out as loving, caring people trying to do the right thing," she says.
5. **"You need to get a 'real' life."** As the old saying goes, 'you're preaching to the choir.' "Every caregiver understands that they need to get a life, have a plan, start making time

for themselves," Lavery says. But, telling a caregiver to 'get a life' is like telling them that what they're doing now (caring for a loved one) doesn't matter.

6. **"Why don't you just put you mother in a nursing home? It would be better for everyone."** Lavery says that comments like this can make a caregiver feel like they're not doing a good job taking care of their loved one. The reality is, a nursing home might not be financially feasible, or a caregiver may be trying to keep their loved one at home for as long as possible. Outsiders think they're offering good advice, when they might really just (unintentionally) be making a caregiver feel guilty.
7. **"Why do you visit your dad so much? He doesn't even know you."** If a caregiver is taking care of someone who has Alzheimer's or another form of dementia and lives in a nursing home, people may ask why they bother to visit someone who doesn't even remember who they are. "People need human contact and love, or they will just shrivel up and die," Lavery says, "Caregivers shouldn't feel stupid for going to visit someone who doesn't recognize them outwardly. As long as they know who their loved one is, that's all that should matter."
8. **"Don't feel guilty about..."** When you're a caregiver, "guilt just comes with the territory," according to Lavery. Caregivers want to fix everything, to solve every problem, to ease every hurt, when the reality is that no one can do it all. When people tell a caregiver not to feel guilty about something, it can make things worse by bringing that guilt to the forefront of their mind.
9. **"Let's not talk about that. Let's talk about something happy and fun."** When it comes to your average small talk scenario, caregivers generally don't have a lot of "fun" things to contribute. Lavery says that people need to understand that people taking care of an elderly loved one need to talk about what's going on. Friends and family members of caregivers should take the time to listen to what a caregiver has to say, no matter how 'unpleasant,' or 'unhappy' it is.
10. **"You must be so relieved that it's over."** When their elderly loved one dies a caregiver is likely to be facing a bunch of mixed up emotions. Relief may be one of those feelings, but Lavery feels that it's probably not productive to point this out to a person who has just lost a parent, spouse, or sibling. "If you diminish the event, you diminish the life and effort of the caregiver," she says.
11. **"When are you going to get over it (a senior's death) and move on?"** Grief is an individual process. For some people, processing the death of a loved one will take some time. This is particularly true of caregivers, who've poured a significant amount of time and energy into taking care of the person who has just passed.

Tips for responding to callous comments

Conventional conversational courtesies tend to fly out the window when intense situations (like caregiving) and strong emotions collide.

Caregivers, according to Lavery, tend to have a heightened sensitivity. "Everything seems to affect you more than when you're a normal person going to work and dealing with family, because you're so on edge and trying to do a million things in a day," she says.

It's easy for stressed-out caregivers to take a well-intentioned comment or question the wrong way and snap at whoever said it. Lavery has a few general suggestions for caregivers:

1. Respond calmly to whatever is said.
2. If you're hurt by someone's question or comment, you can say "I know that you really care about me, but what you just said didn't feel good, here's why..."
3. Use hurtful comments as a way to ask for help. For example, you could say: "I'd love to figure out how to, 'get a life.' As my friend, would you be willing to sit down and brainstorm ways to help me balance being a caregiver and having a 'real' life?"



Strategies for Getting (and Staying) Organized While Caregiving

By Carol Bradley Bursack, www.aging.com

Caring for a vulnerable person can be rewarding as well as frustrating. It can increase our self-esteem to know that we are helping someone in need, while at the same time it can burden us with guilt because we know we aren't perfect caregivers (no one is).

Caregiving is a continual learning process and no two situations are identical, but becoming as organized as possible and making an effort to stay that way can help relieve stress.

Each person's organization process is unique—what is orderly for one person may be a mess for someone else; what seems obsessively organized to you may appear simply tidy to a friend.

Regardless of those differences, sometimes a move toward change can be helpful. Below are some tips that may help you organize your life as a caregiver.

Organizing for an ordinary day

Most of us have typical daily routines we carry out with our loved ones even when we know that we must be alert for potential emergencies. Some thoughts about routine organization could include:

- **Setting up medications:** Most people use some type of container with medications arranged by day and/or time of day. This is easy. What I find not so easy is coping with the timing of insurance companies and a care receiver's need for medication. Ideally, there should be at least a week of reserve medication in case illness, weather or some other issue keeps you from picking up your loved one's prescription. I prefer a simple calendar for this task, but there are electronic calendars and other reminders available as well.
- **Enhancements to the daily routine:** A friend of mine saw the covered plates that some hospitals use to keep meals warm and inquired as to how to purchase one. Both the hospital and a manufacturer of these items gave him samples. While this may seem like a small concern, being able to keep food warm for a slow eater is a very nice perk. Other small but useful products can help make days more enjoyable. As a blogger on elder care, nearly every day I receive several messages about newly developed items. One of the best I've seen is a two handled mug. The mugs offer great stability and more independence for the elder. Being open to newly developed products can make a difference in daily care. Internet searches on products for elderly people can be informative and often rewarding.
- **Being ready to handle an emergency is part of daily living:** That may mean keeping snow cleared from your driveway and having warm clothes handy for you and your loved one. It could also mean keeping a bag packed with medications and supplies for a care receiver during a time when natural disasters are most likely to occur. Think about your loved one's needs ahead of time and plan for possible emergencies.
- **Keep a written journal of a care receiver's current needs:** This shouldn't take a lot of time if done daily and it could save you time in an emergency. It could also make it far easier to transfer care for your loved one to someone else should you suddenly not be able to provide their care.
- **A second journal for yourself:** Journaling can relieve frustration, clarify thoughts and simply keep track of how your life is going. You may want to treat yourself to a handsome journal of some kind. It needn't be expensive but something nice may encourage you to write. Conversely, you could dedicate a folder in your computer for this if you prefer typing. Journaling is one way to help you decide if you are reaching the time when you need more help with caregiving or you may use it to simply track your own moods.
- **A dedicated calendar:** A calendar specifically for keeping track of appointments, entertainment and other engagements concerning your loved one can be helpful. Some people may find this method cumbersome, while others prefer to have everything in one place. It's all about what works best for you.
- **Reduce clutter:** Yes, I know that seems impossible when we look at the medical paperwork that stuffs our mailboxes and all the extra equipment our loved ones need. However, some type of organization early on can save frustration in the event of an emergency, during tax time or simply when making a call to the physician's office. You don't need a sophisticated system – just one that makes sense to you.

- **Allow for diminishing capacity of your care receiver:** In elder care, a care receiver isn't likely to get well. Therefore, it serves everyone involved when we, as caregivers, anticipate future needs. This may mean checking out care facilities, even if you never intend to use one. Knowing the good adult day care facilities, the ideal in-home care agencies and the best assisted living and nursing homes in your community is essential knowledge for a lone caregiver to have.
- **Find a way to do something you enjoy:** You may be homebound with your elder or you may go out to help provide care for him or her. Either way, you should be able to listen to music you enjoy, read a book or spend time on the computer with a support group, at a minimum. You also deserve to see friends and enjoy some "me time." I'm aware that this sounds idealistic to many, but some self-care is a must to preserve your ability to provide care for others.

Organizing for a potential emergency

- **Back up relief:** You may or may not have anyone who can relieve you on a regular basis, but you definitely need to have backup help for emergencies. Whether that means that you complete paperwork ahead of time with an in-home care agency and perhaps use their services a few hours a month to stay on their radar, or you have a neighbor you can call, you need someone who can take over for you if you become temporarily incapacitated.
- **Stay prepared for the most likely emergency:** Seizures? Frequent falling? Diabetic issues? Do your best, of course, to prevent these emergencies, but also try to be prepared for whatever you must do until you receive professional assistance.
- **Keep an information folder in an obvious place:** This folder should have resource phone numbers such as your care receiver's doctor, the clinic's off-hours nurse number and prescription names and dosages along with the pharmacy number. You'll also want to list names of emergency family and friend contacts, copies of insurance and other medical cards, and a list of allergies and other essential information for yourself and/or emergency personnel. A copy of the Power Of Attorney for health care is a must, as well. Also, try to keep that daily journal with the folder so that up-to-date information is handy.

As with most suggestions I've made through my years of writing articles, I'm simply telling readers what's worked for me. I hope that some of these suggestions will give you food for thought so that you can organize or simplify your caregiving life. Try out the ideas that appeal to you and if you have additional tips that you find helpful please let us know.



RECIPE CORNER



Tuna Cakes

photo by: Kraft

Forget everything you know about tuna cakes. Simple, cheesy and held together with hearty stuffing, these will win over even those determined not to like seafood.

6 servings

2 cans (5 oz. each) chunk light tuna in water, drained, flaked
1 pkg. (6 oz.) STOVE TOP Stuffing Mix for Chicken
1 cup KRAFT Shredded Mild Cheddar Cheese
 $\frac{3}{4}$ cup water
1 carrot, shredded
 $\frac{1}{3}$ cup KRAFT Real Mayo Mayonnaise or MIRACLE WHIP Dressing
2Tbsp. CLAUSSEN Sweet Pickle Relish

COMBINE ingredients. Refrigerate 10 min.

HEAT large nonstick skillet sprayed with cooking spray on medium heat. Use ice cream scoop to add $\frac{1}{3}$ -cup portions of tuna mixture, in batches, to skillet.

FLATTEN into patties with back of spatula. Cook 6 min. or until golden brown on both sides, carefully turning patties after 3 min.

Kraft Kitchens Tips

Serving Suggestion - Serve with a quick-and-easy homemade tartar sauce. Just mix $\frac{1}{2}$ cup additional mayo with 2 Tbsp. additional pickle relish and 1 Tbsp. chopped onions.

For Easier Handling in the Skillet - Shape tuna mixture into patties, then place in single layer on baking sheet. Refrigerate 1 hour before cooking as directed.

Healthy Living - *Save 60 calories and 7g of fat per serving by preparing with KRAFT 2% Milk Shredded Cheddar Cheese and KRAFT Light Mayo Reduced Fat Mayonnaise.*



Caregiver Meditation

"A joyful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones." -- Proverbs 17:22

Thank You, dear Father, through my Savior, Jesus Christ for teaching me to daily rejoice and be glad that I am Your child, that my sins are forgiven and that I will live in heaven with You someday. I also rejoice that I am made in Your likeness and have a sense of humor. I'm learning that being able to laugh at movies, funny cards, and at myself is a great stress relief. Give me wisdom to find pleasure in ordinary events, despite my brokenness, and to live life to the fullest. Jesus, my Savior, You are the source of my happiness and contentment. Guide me to focus on the fact that it is not the trials or challenges that I have but what I do with them that makes the difference. In Jesus' name, Amen.