

The Caregiver Link

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QUOTES

“Life consists not in holding good cards but in playing those you hold well.”

~Josh Billings

“The purpose of life is a life of purpose.”

~Robert Byrne

“Your life is what your thoughts make it.”

~Marcus Aurelius

“Any idiot can face a crisis - its day to day living that wears you out.”

~Anton Chekhov

Getting Your Feelings Out: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly

Christina was struggling. She was taught from an early age that she mustn't complain about her circumstances. “When life hands you lemons,” her mother would often explain, “you just turn them into lemonade.”

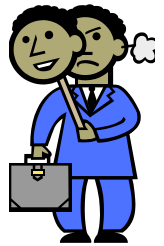
But Christina's commitment to a positive attitude was being tested to the limits. She had a surgery that, the doctor promised, would entail a “brief” recovery period. But “brief” became long and recovery was being measured more in micrometers rather than leaps and bounds.

When a friend called to ask how she was doing several weeks into the process, the dam of emotion finally burst. “I can't handle it anymore,” Christina said. “The pain is still so bad I haven't had a good night's sleep in weeks.” She went on for several minutes while Anna listened patiently. When Christina's emotional outburst ran down, she apologized profusely. Anna just laughed and said, “We all have to spew sometime!”

Christina's venting couldn't change anything for the better. Or could it? Anna was amazed when Christina called a few days later to thank her for listening and to tell her, “I slept through the night for the first time that night and have slept soundly every night since!”

Researchers have found that getting negative feelings out is powerful. This, of course, flies in the face of the newer trend toward “positive psychology”, which tells us we should always focus on the bright side. Christina would now say this makes sense only after the explosion.

To complain or not to complain is a relevant question for caregivers and their loved ones alike. Certainly a caregiver's job is more than difficult enough without listening to endless complaints from the patient; complaints that don't change reality one iota. On the other side of the coin, caregivers can't help but notice the eye rolls and rapid shifts in topic when they try to talk about the frustrations of their lives. But is all discussion of the difficulties of our lives simply pointless complaining to be avoided at all costs? Or does some release of our dissatisfaction and dilemmas actually serve a useful purpose?



First let us define our terms. We tend to clump together words like complain, vent and getting the feelings out as meaning the same thing. But there are important differences.

The word “complain” has a negative reputation. The dictionary says it means “to express grief, pain, or discontent such as *complaining* about the weather” or “to make a formal accusation or charge”. Even the definition makes complaining look useless by giving “complaining about the weather” as an example. And none of us wants to be labeled “a complainer” by others. Complaining sounds way too much like whining.

Venting is another kettle of fish. It is defined as giving free play or expression to an emotion or feeling. In venting, we are not just talking about an event or circumstance that displeases us, we are also releasing the feeling it

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generates. This is an important distinction because it is those negative feelings that, when pushed down as in Christina's case, can do serious damage.

Christina's suppressed emotions were slowing her healing process. These buried feelings can also generate increased anxiety, depression, damage to our immune systems and many other unpleasant to life-threatening mental and emotional consequences. But venting also has a negative reputation. We picture an angry person blowing off steam on the innocent folks around them. And this picture is sometimes all too accurate.

It may be most productive to use the wording in the title of this article ~ getting the feelings out. And let's give this a definition that eliminates the negative connotations of complaining and venting and embraces the healthy parts of the issue. Let's say getting the feelings out is releasing the negative emotions a difficult situation raises in a healthy and productive way. This is a helpful definition because:

- ◆ It acknowledges that we, as human beings, all experience the negative emotions that the lemons in life generate. The person who says, "I never get angry", is probably more accurately telling you that she does not allow herself to acknowledge her anger. Certainly there are people whose emotional style seldom includes anger but everyone gets angry at times and suppressing it has a high physical and emotional cost.
- ◆ It indicates emotions can be released in a planned way. When we try to hold in strong feelings, we are running the risk of having them explode on your loved one or others who happen to be around when the dam breaks. This can cause hurt feelings at the very least and may alienate your support system for the future. It is much more productive to recognize that difficult feelings are building and set up a time and a person with whom to release them. It might be a pastor, counselor or special friend. It just needs to be someone who will let you get these feelings out without judging you, who won't say "you shouldn't feel that way" and who will never repeat your personal business to others.
- ◆ It encourages healthy and productive behavior. Constantly venting the same complaint is not productive and, in fact, excessive repetition actually increases the negative emotions attached to it. But don't misunderstand the word "productive". In this case, it does not mean that talking about the frustrations of caregiving will change or fix them. Productive, in this instance, means getting the hard feelings out so they do not further complicate your situation.

There are many healthy ways to get your feelings out. Talking to a support person is just one of them. Researchers have found that writing about your feelings in a journal is almost as powerful as talking about them. Some caregiving issues may be just too private to discuss with anyone else. Or you may need to talk at 3:00 a.m., when your support system is peacefully snoring away. Or the emotions you are experiencing are just so alien to you that you don't want anyone else to know. Journals are private and always available.

You may not be the person to listen to the venting of your patient. You have enough on your shoulders already. Together, choose someone you both trust to fill this role. Make sure this person understands he is not there to support a merry-go-round of repeated complaints that will only make your loved one feel worse but to facilitate the release of pent up frustration.

As her recovery drags on, Christina may need to again release her feelings. Long-lasting or chronic situations such as caregiving may need a periodic release of steam like a boiling tea kettle. But how wonderful to know that it works!

by Andrea Heeres

Creating Confident Caregivers

Are you caring for a family member with dementia and/or memory loss?

Creating Confident Caregivers may be a solution for you! Creating Confident Caregivers uses the Savvy Caregiver Program, a university tested program for family members caring for a loved one with dementia at home. Two-hour sessions are held once a week for six weeks and lead by staff trained in the program. Caregivers receive new information, skills and attitudes to manage stress and increase effective caregiving skills.

Respite Care for your family member with memory loss can be provided free of charge so caregivers may attend the sessions.

Fridays: October 7, 14, 21, 28 & November 4 & 11
Time: 10:00 am -12:00 pm
Location: **Tanglewood Park**
560 Seminole Road.
Norton Shores. 49444

For more information or to register for this class call Amy @ 231-733-3519 or Maggie @ 231-733-3509

There is no charge for these programs

This program is supported, in part, by the U.S. Administration on Aging through its Alzheimer's Disease Supportive Services Program, (#90AE0322) and the Michigan Office of Services to the Aging.

**The Mission Of Senior Resources
An Area Agency on Aging**

To provide a comprehensive and coordinated system of services designed to promote the independence and dignity of older persons and their families in Muskegon, Oceana, and Ottawa counties — a mission compelling us to target older persons in greatest need but to advocate for all.

**To contact us, please call
Amy or Mary at:**

September's website: treatmentdiaries.com

"Our Friend's House"

The Oceana County Council on Aging is very proud to announce the opening of "Our Friend's House" Adult Day Care Service. At "Our Friend's House" you will find compassion, care, and support for Oceana County residents who are at least 60 years of age who require regular supervision and/or assistance. We offer "our friend's" engaging activities throughout the day, exercise for the body and mind, meals and snacks and an opportunity to socialize. We provide caregivers support and understanding, a safe place for your loved one, the opportunity to renew your own friendships, and resources and information. We are open Monday thru Friday, 9 am to 4 pm. "Our Friend's House" is located at 215 S Courtland Street, Hart, MI. If you are interested please call 231-873-4488.

Readers Corner:

Mothering Mother: A Daughter's Humorous and Heartbreaking Memoir by Carol O'Dell, Published by Kunati, 2007.



O'Dell, a member of the "sandwich generation"--made up of boomers taking care of both their own children and their elderly parents--portrays the experience of looking after a mother suffering from Alzheimer's and Parkinson's with brutal honesty and refreshing grace. She peppers the memoir with scenes from her past, including meeting her adoptive parents ("The first time I saw Mama, I was four years old") and the death of her father. With three children and a husband of her own, O'Dell is torn in multiple directions, trying to be mother, daughter, nurse, cook, caregiver, maid, and more to a household of needy people. Mama's neediness is unrelenting, and O'Dell is at once bitter and sorry that her mother cannot be who she was. When the inevitable end comes, O'Dell wonders why she longed for the free time she now finds lonely and empty. A beautiful rendering of a difficult but all-too-common situation, told with plenty of humor, a touch of martyrdom, and much love. Mary Frances Wilkens Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved

