

Family Caregiving

Caregivers face many challenges. Caregiving is a demanding task. Caregivers need time off from their caregiving responsibilities to relieve stress and prevent burnout. Effective, sustainable caregiving depends on meeting the caregiver's own needs for nurture, reassurance, support and periodic respite.

Respite care provides time off for family members who care for someone who is ill, injured or frail. It can take place in an adult day center, in the home of the person being cared for, or even in a residential setting such as an assisted living facility or nursing home. Although there are different approaches to respite care, all have the same basic objective; to provide caregivers with *planned* temporary, intermittent, substitute care, allowing for relief from the daily responsibilities of caring for the care recipient. Respite care is essential for all caregivers.

Caregivers are at increased risk of depression and other symptoms of distress. The symptoms of burnout are very similar to those of depression. In fact, the two conditions often contribute to one another. The symptoms can be:

- Persistent symptoms of depression
- Constant anxiety, irritability, or anger
- Feelings of detachment, numbness, or exhaustion
- Continuous self-criticism
- Withdrawal from usual activities
- Negligence or hatred of caregiving responsibilities
- Trouble at work or in relationships
- Substance abuse

A recent study in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* has shown that seniors providing care for an ailing spouse are likely to become sick more often and experience more stress than similar people who aren't caregivers.

In San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara Counties, the Area Agency on Aging funds several respite care programs with Family Caregiver Support Program monies from the Older Americans Act. These programs are operated by the following agencies: Linkages Program at the LifeSteps Foundation and Visiting Nurse & Hospice Care. Other respite care programs are also available locally.

The Area Agency on Aging & United Way of Santa Barbara County recently partnered to release a Request For Proposal for the provision of additional respite care services.

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