

December 2020

Boomers, Elders, & More E-Newsletter

Monthly Elder Care Newsletter of the Vanderbilt Child & Family Center



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A Message from the Wellbeing Manager

The holidays are always challenging for family caregivers as we are all overwhelmed and exhausted and often do not have the time or energy or ability to celebrate the way we have in the past. This year, as we all live through the pandemic, the holidays may be even more complicated.

There are many factors we cannot control when it comes to our loved ones' health and abilities, as well as COVID-19 safety precautions, so adjust your view of a successful holiday. Talk about prioritizing the holiday activities that hold the deepest **meaning** and are most **doable** this year. Allow yourself to embrace the "something is better than nothing" mindset. Focus on what feels the most necessary to produce a holiday feeling and create new memories.

- For some people the most meaningful aspects of the holiday may be family gatherings – so focus on a way to do that safely, whether it's an outdoor gathering with fewer numbers or a video mealtime with loved ones all over the country.
- If the decorating and preparing for the holidays bring the most joy – go for it – you can still decorate to the maximum extent possible and bake at home.
- If religious services are the most meaningful, find out how services will be offered and focus on the safest way to participate.
- While you may not have a traditional shopping trip this year, you can shop online while on video with loved ones, listen to holiday music and bake some cookies while you are at it.

Talk with the loved ones you care for and find out what they find most meaningful and you will find a way to touch their hearts this year too.

Find the full article at <https://community.aarp.org/t5/Leave-a-Caregiving-Tip/1-Caregiver-Holiday-Survival-Tip-Focus-on-What-is-Most/0/2335423>

Upcoming Event

Family Caregiver Support Group

Thursday, December 10th

12:00 – 1:00 PM

Location: Zoom

The Caregiver Support Group is a monthly group that offers a safe space to discuss the stresses, challenges, and rewards of providing care for an aging loved one.

Please RSVP for Zoom details to stacey.l.bonner@vanderbilt.edu

Caregiver Burnout: Steps for Coping with Stress

Recognize the signs and get the help you need to reduce the toll on your body and mind
AARP | Updated May 14, 2020



Taking care of a loved one who has dementia, physical disabilities or other age-related conditions makes demands on your time, energy and emotions seem overwhelming.

Caregiving can tax your patience and foster fatigue, frustration and guilt, becoming a grueling grind that takes a heavy toll on the caregiver's body and mind. The effects on physical and mental health are well documented.

- Thirty-six percent of family caregivers characterize their situation as highly stressful, according to the "Caregiving in the U.S. 2020" report from AARP and the National Alliance for Caregiving (NAC).
- In the five years since AARP and NAC last conducted the national survey, the proportion of caregivers describing their health as excellent or very good dropped from 48 percent to 41 percent.
- A 2018 study from insurance firm Genworth found that four in 10 caregivers experienced depression, mood swings and resentment as a result of their labors.
- Research cited by the American Psychological Association found that among people age 55 to 75, those who are caregivers show a 23 percent higher level of stress hormones, which can lead to high blood pressure, and a 15 percent lower level of immune response, making them more vulnerable to the flu and other infections.

Causes of caregiver burnout

Along with the heavy workload and emotional demands of family caregiving, these issues also can contribute to burnout.

- **Conflicting demands** as you try to balance the needs of the care recipient, coworkers and employers, family members, and yourself.
- **Lack of control** over money and resources and a lack of the skills needed to effectively manage a loved one's care.
- **Lack of privacy** because caregiving may leave you with little time to be alone.
- **Role confusion**, difficulty separating your roles as caregiver and as the parent, sibling or spouse of the care recipient.
- **Unreasonable demands** placed upon a caregiver by other family members or the person being cared for.
- **Unrealistic expectations** about the effect caregiving efforts will have on loved ones with progressive diseases such as Parkinson's or Alzheimer's.

Sources: Cleveland Clinic, Johns Hopkins Medicine

Over time, that physical and psychological wear and tear can lead to caregiver burnout – a condition of feeling exhausted, listless and unable to cope. It can cause caregivers to make mistakes that could endanger a loved one, such as mismanaging medication, or lead to unhealthy behaviors like smoking or alcohol abuse.

That is why it is so important to watch for signs of caregiver burnout and take proactive steps to deal with it before it spirals out of control.

Warning Signs of Caregiver Burnout

The Alzheimer’s Association cites 10 indicators that a caregiver may be experiencing a high level of stress:

- **Anger or frustration** toward the person you are caring for
- **Anxiety**
- **Denial** about your loved one’s condition
- **Depression**
- **Exhaustion** that makes it tough to complete your daily tasks
- **Health problems**, such as getting sick more often
- **Inability to concentrate** that makes it difficult to perform familiar tasks or causes you to forget appointments
- **Irritability** and moodiness
- **Sleeplessness**
- **Social withdrawal** from friends and activities that you used to enjoy

For more information on this article, tips to reduce caregiver stress, and a tool to evaluate when tending to a loved one is taking a toll can be found here:

<https://www.aarp.org/caregiving/life-balance/info-2019/caregiver-stress-burnout.html?int cmp=AE-CAR-CLB-R4-C2>



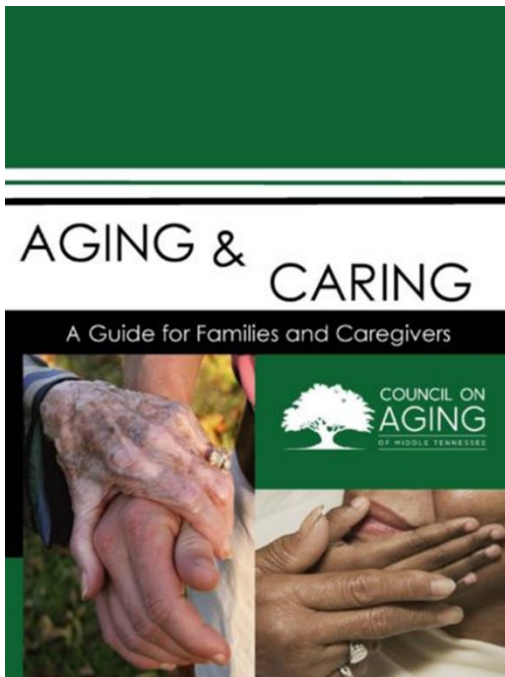
Aging & Caring: A Guide for Families and Caregivers

The Book of the Month is designed to assist those caring for an older adult. This guide provides the framework for helping caregivers understand a variety of issues while planning for and with an older adult.

Caregivers can receive a complimentary copy of the book by calling the Council on Aging at 615-353-4235. There is a \$4.00 postage fee for mailing.

You can view the book online at

<https://directory.coamidtn.org/ebooks/aging-and-caring-a-guide-for-families-and-caregivers>

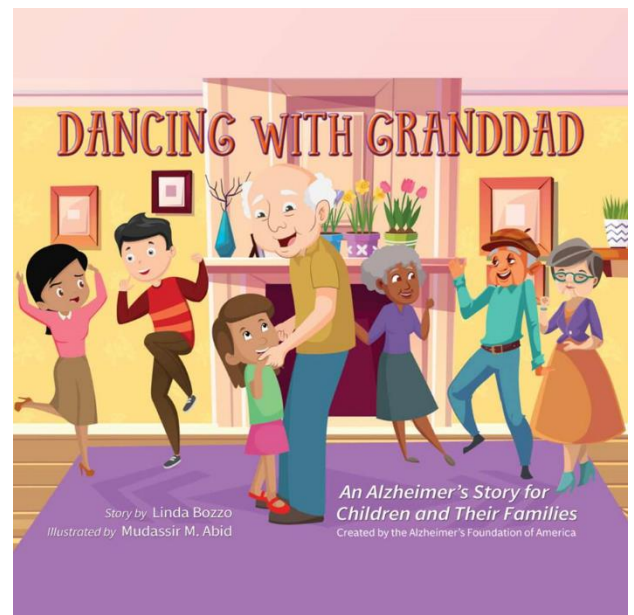


Dancing with Granddad

Dancing with Granddad is a children's book to provide the teaching tools which adults can use to have a conversation with their children about Alzheimer's.

This book will help guide you to help explain what is going on with a parent or grandparent who is going through the symptoms such as memory loss, changes in mood, and wandering.

Suggested for children ages 5 to 8.



A Caregiver's Bill of Rights

By Jo Horne

I have the right:

To take care of myself. This is not an act of selfishness. It will give me the capability of taking better care of my loved one.

To seek help from others even though my loved ones may object. I recognize the limits of my own endurance and strength.

To maintain facets of my own life that do not include the person I care for, just as I would if he or she were healthy. I know that I do everything that I reasonably can for this person, and I have the right to do some things just for myself.

To get angry, be depressed, and express other difficult feelings occasionally.

To reject any attempts by my loved one (either conscious or unconscious) to manipulate me through guilt, and/or depression.

To receive consideration, affection, forgiveness, and acceptance for what I do, from my loved ones, for as long as I offer these qualities in return.

To take pride in what I am accomplishing and to applaud the courage it has sometimes taken to meet the needs of my loved one.

To protect my individuality and my right to make a life for myself that will sustain me in the time when my loved one no longer need my full-time help.

To expect and demand that as new strides are made in finding resources to aid physically and mentally impaired persons in our country, similar strides will be made towards aiding and supporting caregivers.