

March 2021

# Boomers, Elders, and More E-Newsletter

Monthly Elder Care Newsletter of the Vanderbilt Child & Family Center



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## A Message from the Wellbeing Manager

Many of you have probably set caregiver resolutions at the beginning of the year. Those aspirations may consist of asking for help, taking time to care for yourself, joining a support group, or learning about local resources.

Resolutions for caregivers are hard especially since a caregiver typically is juggling many of life's balls – children, career, and caregiving – and the ball getting dropped is the one that says “self-care.”

With Spring approaching, this is a good time to revisit your caregiver pledge. Ask yourself a few questions: Am I achieving my caregiving resolutions? What obstacles lie ahead that could prevent me from reaching and obtaining my caregiving commitments?

It is okay if you must revamp or revise your caregiver resolutions to fit your caregiving needs. Seeing your caregiver's aspirations through will not happen unless you are willing to revisit, reevaluate and recommit yourself.

Choose today as your opportunity to renew your dedication to yourself!

Self-care

A graphic with the word "Self-care" in a large, pink, cursive font. Below it is a block of text in a smaller, black, sans-serif font. The entire graphic is set against a light pink background with a white border.

YOU DO MATTER,  
YOUR LOVING  
HEART AND CARING  
IS NOTICED AND  
ADMIRED EVERY  
DAY. SO PLEASE  
TAKE THE TIME FOR  
YOU.

A FIT CAREGIVER



# Loneliness in Older Adults

## A Public Health Crisis

Loneliness, a very common emotion, can come and go throughout our lives, but it is recognized as a health concern as well. The onset of the coronavirus pandemic and the resulting stay-at-home orders and visitation restrictions at long-term care facilities dramatically increased the prevalence of loneliness among our senior citizens.

“Even before the pandemic, loneliness and social isolation have been considered health risks for older adults, especially those in rural areas and long-term care facilities. Isolation and loneliness are associated with a 50% increased risk of developing dementia, a 32% increased risk of stroke, and a nearly fourfold increased death among heart-failure patients,” said gerontologist Anne Asman, MS, Director of Advancement and Outreach with the University of Utah’s Department of Psychiatry, during an AFA Educating America Tour virtual conference. “COVID-19 has exacerbated the risk of a public health crisis. Currently, 43% of Americans ages 60 and over report feeling lonely.”

Asman believes that symptom awareness is needed to combat this crisis. Families and professional caregivers need to be aware of loneliness symptoms that may include depression, anxiety, and behavioral and physical changes, onset of new memory issues, weight gain/loss, insomnia or excessive sleeping.

Find the full article at: [Alz.-Today-Vol.-15-No.-4-LR.pdf \(alzfdn.org\)](#)

We also need to accept and understand that not all older adults embrace technology. Training seniors (or their families and care staff) how to use platforms like FaceTime, Zoom, and social media is necessary to bridge the current social divide. Ideally, training should be in person, but in the current environment, the phone can be used to walk someone through the connection process step by step and answer questions, rather than simply sending them an email list or a tutorial video. Seniors also need to have the physical tools to utilize these platforms, such as laptop/tablet/smartphone, data networks, and internet service.

Asman noted, “They can adapt in many instances if there is someone there, even on the phone, to help and tutor them. Once they’re in, they love it.”

Connecting seniors with online activities, such as virtual tours, music performances, and activity programming, is a helpful way for seniors to stay connected. A variety of places and organizations offer these services now, including Alzheimer’s Foundation of America, which provides daily activity programming on its Facebook page (visit [www.alzfdn.org/events](http://www.alzfdn.org/events) to view the schedule).

“If we can get seniors trained and online to take advantage of these opportunities, they probably won’t be lonely for very long. Let’s get them connected!” Asman said.

# 15 Ways to Stay Sane While Caring For an Elderly Parent



One of the most emotionally complex and difficult things a person can experience is taking care of an elderly parent. I recently spent time tending to my aging, widowed father, and thought I'd pass along these 15 points, each of which I found to be significantly helpful during this phase of my life.

1. **Accept that things have changed.** When a parent starts in any way depending upon their child, a world has turned upside down. Be prepared for that radically new paradigm. Old roles may not apply; old methodologies may not apply; old *emotions* may not apply. Be prepared to work from – and write – a whole new script.
2. **Take it slowly.** Taking care of an elderly parent is generally a marathon, not a sprint. You and they both are in uncharted territory. Let the process reveal itself to you; to the degree that you can, let whatever happens unfold organically.
3. **Expect nothing emotionally.** At the end phase of their life, your parent might open up to you emotionally and spiritually; they

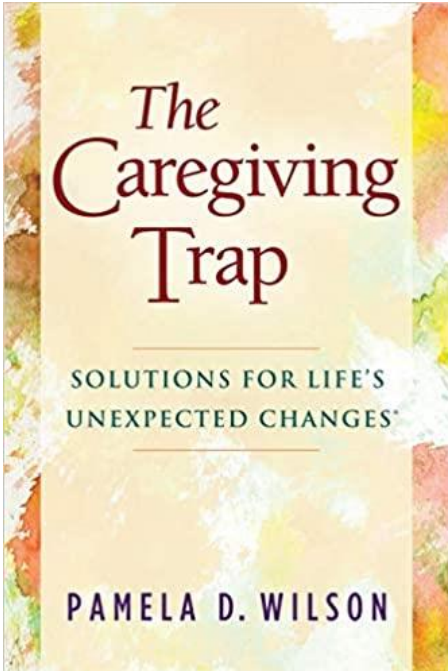
might express for you the love that, for whatever reason, they haven't before. But they also might not do that; your parent might even more tenaciously cling to their crazy. If as you care for your aging parent you bond with them in a new and deeper way, of course that's fantastic. But going into caring for them expecting or even hoping for that to happen is to wade into dangerous waters. Better to have no expectations and be surprised, than to have your hopes dashed.

4. **Expect their anger.** When you start taking care of your parent, they lose the one thing they've always had in relationship to you: authority. That's not going to be easy for them to give up. Expect them, in one way or another, to last out about that loss.
5. **Give them their autonomy.** So far as you can, offer your parent options instead of orders. It's important for them to continue to feel as if they, and not you, are running their lives. Let them decide



- everything they can about their own care and situation.
6. **Ask their advice.** A great way to show your parent love and respect – and, especially, to affirm for them that they are still of true value to you – is to sincerely ask them for advice about something going on in your life.
  7. **Separate their emotional dysfunction from their cognitive dysfunction.** As much as you can, through your conversations and interactions with your parent, learn to distinguish between their emotional and cognitive dysfunction. The patterns of your parent's emotional dysfunctions will probably be familiar to you. But their cognitive dysfunctioning will probably be new to you. Track it; react to it gingerly; discuss it with your parent's health care providers. Mostly, just be aware that it's new, and so demands a new kind of response.
  8. **Love your health care providers.** During this phase of your life, you don't *have* better friends than those helping you care for your parent. Treat well each and every person who plays any role whatsoever in caring for your parent. Steady kindness, and little gifts here and there, can go a long way toward ensuring that is how they feel.
  9. **Depend upon your spouse.** You may find that your parent is more comfortable relating to your spouse than to you. Though that can certainly hurt your feelings, don't let it. It's simply because your parent doesn't share with your spouse all the baggage, they do with you; mainly, they've never been the dominate force in your spouse's life. Your spouse and your parent are peers to a degree that you and your parent can never be. Let that work for you.
  10. **Protect your buttons.** No one in this world knows your emotional buttons like your parent does. Surround those buttons with titanium cases and lock them away where your parent couldn't find them. Unless he or she is extraordinarily loving and mature person, your parent is bound to at least once to try to push your button, if only to establish their previous dominance over you. Don't let them do it. You might owe them your care, but you don't owe them your emotional well-being.
  11. **Prepare for sibling insanity.** Expect the worst from your sibling(s). For perfectly understandable reasons, many people go positively bonkers when their parents start to die. Do *not* participate in it yourself. Insofar as you must, of course protect yourself. But no amount of money on earth is worth your dignity.
  12. **Take care of yourself.** It's so easy to surrender to the care of your aging parent more than you should. But you serve well neither yourself nor them if you don't take care of yourself. Make taking time to rejuvenate yourself as a critical part of your care routine for your parent as you do cooking their meals or making sure they take their meds.
  13. **Talk to a friend.** If you have a friend with whom you can regularly meet and talk, or even chat with on the phone, do it. During this time the input and love of a friend is invaluable to you. Sharing what you're going through with someone not immediately involved with it can be like a life preserver when you're bobbing in the ocean. As soon as you get involved with tending to your parent, call your best friend, and tell them that you're going to be depending upon them to do what friends do best: care, and listen.
  14. **Have fun.** One of the things we most need in life is the one thing we most readily put off once we begin caring for an elderly parent: fun. *Fun!* Have some! Have lots! Whatever it takes. Whenever, wherever, and however you can, truly enjoy.
  15. **Pray or meditate.** Life doesn't offer a lot more emotionally salient or complex than caring for an aging parent. What you're undergoing with your parent right now is bigger than you, your parent, or anyone else involved.

Find the full article at: [15 Ways to Stay Sane While Caring For an Elderly Parent | HuffPost Life](#)



## The Caregiving Trap: Solutions for Life's Unexpected Changes

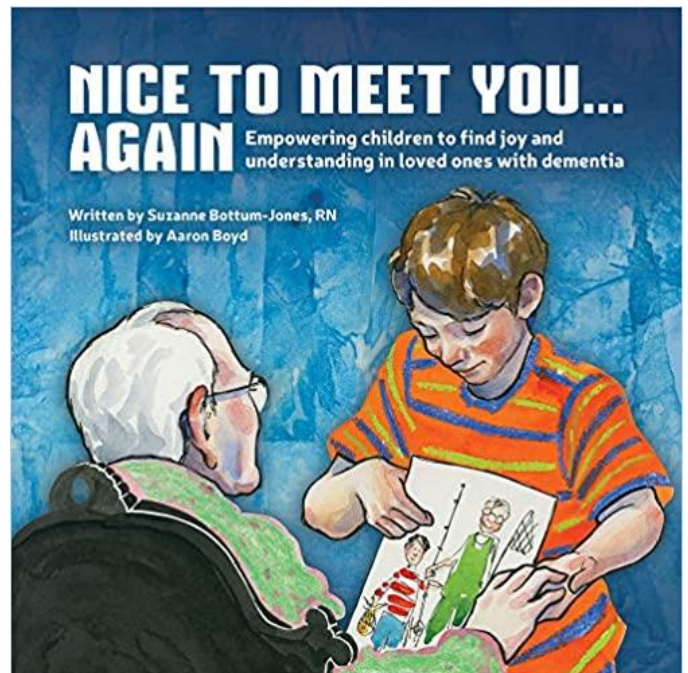
By: Pamela D. Wilson

Caring for aging parents and family members with declining health can stir up a range of feelings that include guilt, sadness, and exhaustion. The Book of the Month delivers solutions that will settle your emotions and help you make informed and intelligent decisions as a caregiver and on behalf of loved ones.

## Nice to Meet You.....Again Empowering Children to Find Joy and Understanding in Loved Ones with Dementia

By: Susan Bottum-Jones

The Book of the Month is an unforgettable story that takes readers through a range of emotions, from sadness to hope. This story is a lesson for children and adults to learn to accept a loved one experiencing dementia and to celebrate the joy in the interactions they still experience together.



## Upcoming Events

### **FAMILY CAREGIVER SUPPORT GROUP**

The Caregiver Support Group is a monthly group that offers a safe place to discuss the stresses, challenges, and rewards of providing care for an aging loved one. The meetings will be held virtually for the foreseeable future from noon to 1 p.m.

March's session will be held on Thursday, March 11, 2021 from noon to 1 p.m. Please RSVP ([stacey.l.bonner@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:stacey.l.bonner@vanderbilt.edu)) for Zoom details by Wednesday, March 10.



### **LUNCHTIME SESSION**

The Lunchtime Session is a monthly educational session to receive valuable information while providing care to your loved one.

This month, Dr. Jennifer Kim and Dr. Kanah Lewallen with Vanderbilt University School of Nursing will present the second session for family caregivers of individuals with dementia/Alzheimer's.

They will provide communication strategies and addressing behaviors in dementia. Minimizing distractions, promoting dignity and respect, non-verbal cues, verbal strategies, common triggers for behaviors, and non-pharmacological strategies will be discussed.

March's lunchtime session will be held on Wednesday, March 17, 2021 from 2 p.m. to 3 p.m. Please RSVP ([stacey.l.bonner@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:stacey.l.bonner@vanderbilt.edu)) for Zoom details by Tuesday, March 16 or select the March's zoom link on the attached flyer.



*"Caregiving is a constant learning experience."*

*-Vivian Frazier*