

Avoiding Caregiver Burnout

People that ignore the stress that providing care to a person with a disability may create, are not taking care of themselves and may eventually be sure of burnout will be unable to provide assistance to the person with the disability. The situation is a common one. A caregiver focuses their attention around the needs of the person with the disability. They may continue to work a full-time job and perhaps provide care for the children and for everyone else in the family. They have no time for themselves. They have been able to do this for some time but they are beginning to "burnout". Burnout has been defined in many ways. It is basically the condition of physical exhaustion in which a person no longer has the energy and resources to handle the situation that they are confronting. Paradoxically, a person may often be unaware that they are burning out. The bottom line: If you do not find ways to take care of yourself, you will not be able to take care of others.

Some of the symptoms of burnout that you should look for in yourself and others are the following:

- 1) Increased drug and alcohol abuse. This may involve the increased abuse of alcohol, prescription medication, sleeping pills or tranquilizers or the abuse of such stimulants as cigarettes, coffee and junk food.
- 2) An increasingly negative attitude towards work and life in general.
- 3) Fatigue and physical exhaustion. The person does not feel well physically and may have frequent colds, flu, and problems with blood pressure or breathing.
- 4) Inability to relax. The individual is unable to sleep well and may find no activity relaxing. Even on vacation or time away from work, he/she may feel tense and be constantly thinking of work.
- 5) Increased feelings of alienation and paranoia. The individual begins to feel that they really do not belong. They do not feel comfortable with their family and may feel bored and "out of place".
- 6) Feelings of emotional impotence. In general, the person may feel powerless over his/her environment and unable to affect control over their daily life. Relationships, even positive ones, may begin to feel a burden. There is increasing feelings of apathy, hopelessness, and helplessness.

When a person reaches burnout, the intervention that may be required is often an extreme one. It may require a leave of absence from work, an individual stress management program, or individual, marital, or family counseling. Medical intervention and assessment may also be required. Burnout is a serious problem! It usually is not relieved by simply taking a vacation. The treatment required must be determined by the specific needs of the individual and the nature of the situation that they are confronting.