



AEX-984.2-11

Ohio AgrAbility Fact Sheet Series

Primary Caregiver for a Farm Family Member

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You may not consider yourself a family caregiver; in fact, individuals view themselves as just “doing the right thing.” However, anyone who provides physical and/or emotional care for a family member with limitations is considered a family caregiver. The “family” in family caregiver is deceiving because a family caregiver is anyone who shows up to help, biological family or not. Caregivers can experience an extreme range of emotions, over an extended period of time.

Typical feelings include:

- Anxiety
- Anger
- Sadness
- Concerned
- Resentful
- Guilty
- Accepting
- Embarrassed
- Shocked
- Scared
- Hopelessness/helplessness
- Exhausted
- Overwhelmed
- Frustrated
- Fulfilled to be helping

To cope with these feelings and to keep them from having a negative impact on you and your loved ones, throw out the idea “the harder you work, the better it gets” because that is not the case with an illness or disability. You have little control over it and it will run its own course. Get organized and have a plan.

1. Prioritize what is “must have” versus “nice to have.”
2. Make a list of everything your loved one needs, a separate list for everything the household needs, and another separate list for everything the farm needs.

3. Determine what on that list you can realistically accomplish on your own.
4. Determine which needs must or should be met by a professional, such as rehabilitation and other short-term care beyond your capabilities.
5. Determine which friends and family members have previously offered or would be willing to help. Next to their name, list any skill sets they have that would make them more helpful for a certain task.
6. Then ASK people for help. Many people are willing to help and would like to if asked. They are probably afraid to interfere and do not know how they can help.
7. Once you establish your support system, ask them the best times they would like to help. Knowing when to call will eliminate the feeling that you are “bugging” them and prevent having more help than needed one moment and no help the next.
8. During the day, search for adult day programs that offer daytime services and activities for adults. It will give your loved one time to interact with other people in similar situations and will allow you to keep working outside of the home or on the farm. It will also offer much needed time apart. Even the best relationships need space.

Your health has to come first because if you do not take care of yourself you will not be able to take care of your loved one. In addition to the support mentioned

above, take advantage of social services. Schedule respite services to give you time for “yourself.” It is also very important to take care of yourself physically. Eat a well-balanced diet and make time to exercise for an hour each day. An hour may seem like a lot, but an hour walk will give you time to think and keep your body functioning properly.

Many places offer support to lessen the stresses associated with being a family caregiver.

- Support groups can be found at:
 - Hospitals and other health care providers
 - Places of worship
 - Online
- Psychologists, social workers, or therapists
- Community respite care organizations/services
- National/regional organizations for the specific disability or illness
- Caregiver organizations such as the National Family Caregivers Association, National Alliance for Caregiving, Ohio Respite Coalition, and Well Spouse Foundation

Acknowledgments

This fact sheet was reviewed by Karen Mancl, PhD, Professor, Food, Agricultural and Biological Engineering, The Ohio State University; and Pat Luchkowsky, Director of Public Affairs, Easter Seals of Ohio.

References

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- Institute on Aging. Preventing Stress from Becoming Harmful: A Guide for Caregivers. Institute on Aging, 2002.
- “Ten Tips for Family Caregivers.” Family Caregiving 101. 2004. <http://familycaregiving101.org/manage/tips.cfm>.

10 Tips from the Professionals

1. Take charge of your life and don't let your loved one's limitations shadow over your entire life.
2. Put yourself first once in a while.
3. Utilize short-term services when you know you will be gone for extended periods.
4. Accept people's help and seek support.
5. Educate yourself about your loved one's condition, side effects of medicines, and communicating properly to professionals.
6. Utilize techniques and technology that increase your loved one's independence.
7. Be good to your back.
8. Grieve your losses, and then let go of them, so you can dream new dreams for you and your loved one.
9. Know your rights and the rights of your loved one.
10. Watch for five or more signs of depression, listed below, that last for more than two weeks. Be aware of the signs in yourself and your loved ones.
 - “Down in the dumps” mood
 - Lack of interest in enjoyable activities
 - Change in appetite
 - Change in sleep pattern
 - Fatigue
 - Agitation or slowing down
 - Feelings of unworthiness
 - Unable to concentrate
 - Recurrent thought of death
 - Excessive use of alcohol, drugs, and caffeine
 - Self-destructive behavior

About AgrAbility Based Fact Sheets

These fact sheets were developed to promote success in agriculture for Ohio's farmers and farm families coping with a disability or long-term health condition. AgrAbility offers information and referral materials such as this fact sheet, along with on-site assessment, technical assistance, and awareness in preventing secondary injuries. Fact sheets were developed with funding from NIFA, project number OHON0006.

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