



Your Needs

Spiritual Needs

Spirituality means different things to different people. It may include faith or what provides a sense of personal meaning in life (and death). When dealing with illness, spiritual issues often come to the forefront of the patient's life, as well as your own. Illness and other adversity disrupt your sense of meaning, your values, and even your faith. Addressing your own spiritual needs can help you deal with these concerns and open the possibility of growth from the situation. In doing so, you may be better able to accept the situation, and even find some positive aspects in your role as a caregiver.

Why?

When something like illness happens to you or someone you love, there is a need to make sense of the situation. In this search for understanding, you may find yourself asking and wanting to know "Why?" "Why has God done this to someone I love?"... "Why am I being punished like this?"... "What did the patient or I do to deserve this?" Often, there is no reason or logical explanation. Rather than spending your energy trying to understand why bad things happen, it may help to focus on trying to accept the situation, cope with it, and allow yourself to learn and grow from it. Whether you are religious or not, you may be able to find faith in your existing beliefs about life and God. Use any spiritual distress you feel to find meaning in the situation. Looking at the situation as offering you the opportunity for personal growth may be of some comfort.

Tips for dealing with spiritual issues:

- Take time out to pray, meditate or practice spiritual rituals to nurture yourself.
- Speak to a chaplain or religious figure.
- Attend services at your church, synagogue, mosque, etc.
- Find faith in what you believe, even if you are not affiliated with a religion.
- Try to find meaning in your role as a caregiver.
- See if you can identify anything positive that can or has come out of the situation.
- Think about what you can learn from the situation and how it can make you a stronger person.

Making the Best Out of a Bad Situation

Of course you are not expected to be happy about your situation as a caregiver, or about the patient's illness. Chances are, becoming a caregiver has led to many changes in your life, about which you are not happy. Also, facing the prospect of the patient's health deteriorating and having to watch him/her suffer may be of concern to you. However, while it is perfectly normal for you to mourn your losses, there is always another side of the coin. Try to look at the bigger picture and focus on any positive aspects of the situation. Think about the good times you have shared with the patient, how you feel about having the patient in your life, and how much would be missing if the patient were not in your life.

Whenever you feel yourself getting angry or upset about the situation, take a step back, look at the bigger picture, and reflect on these positive thoughts.

Tips for making the best of the situation:

- Think about ways that caregiving has made you a stronger person.
- Think about why you have accepted this role and any positive aspects of caregiving.
- Think about the positive ways in which caregiving and the patient's illness have changed your relationship with the patient.
- Consider if caregiving has brought you closer to the patient and/or other relatives or friends.
- Make a list of positive aspects of your relationship with the patient, shared memories, and what the patient means to you. Look at the list whenever you find yourself getting upset about the situation.

Keeping the Faith

If you have found yourself questioning God and losing faith due to your loved one's illness, you are not alone. Allow yourself to acknowledge your doubts about God, religion, and spirituality. Then, consider ways in which you can explain and accept the situation through whatever beliefs you have. If your loved one is dying, you may find that you can take comfort in thinking about him/her going to a better place, or joining other loved ones who have passed on.

You may find solace in meditation or prayer if you give it a try. Even if you are skeptical or hesitant, it may be worth it for you to seek help from a spiritual advisor, such as a chaplain or other religious figure. You might be surprised to find that sharing your doubts about God can transform your perspective. You may even find that the situation reestablishes your spirituality or faith in God. Use your faith to help you cope with any obstacles along the way.

Tips for keeping your faith:

- Speak to a chaplain or religious figure who has experience with illness. He/she may be able to help you make sense of your feelings and the situation.
- Give prayer, meditation, or other forms of spiritual worship a chance.
- Explore your beliefs and try to use them to accept the situation.
- Talk to others in similar situations and see how they have integrated spirituality and caregiving.
- Reconnect or establish a connection with a religious community or group. Even when you have lost faith, this can turn out to be a great source of comfort.

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