



# EXTENSION COMMUNITY

## Rewards of Caregiving

Caregiving for a family member can be full of challenges and frustrations. But people who have been interviewed about their caregiving experience--during or after the fact--often report some surprising positive outcomes and observations. A few of the more frequently mentioned rewards include:

### Time with the Person Needing Care

Caregivers often report appreciating the increased hours with a family member. In some cases, caregiving offers opportunities to talk about important and unimportant things, time to get to know each other better, share family stories and history, make decisions and plans for the future, laugh together, and create new memories. Some caregivers who provide hands-on personal care say that the intimacy of their roles enhances the bonding experience. In some cases, time together can help improve or heal relationships and bring needed forgiveness or reconciliation.

### Improved Relationships with Other Families Members Who Share in the Caregiving

Caregivers sometimes report that they get closer to their siblings or other relatives while collaborating in the care of another family member. Although much has been written about the conflicts in “sharing the care” and the division of labor within families, those who have worked through this with some success find that it can bring families closer. Collaborative caregivers have or make the opportunity to communicate more often about the care situation and end up with a clearer view and understanding of the other caregivers’ daily lives.

### The Chance to Make a Difference

Caregiving, whether motivated by love, compassion or duty, has an underlying moral quality to it, and can be

very satisfying. For many, being there to take care of a family member in need is reward in itself. For some, caregiving is an opportunity to give back to a family member in return for gifts received over a lifetime. Some people also report how their caregiving has helped reinforce positive values in their children; these caregivers find they become role models in how to care for others.

### Connectedness with Other Caregivers

The need to step into a caregiver role often catches us by surprise. Sometimes it comes in response to a crisis; sometimes it sneaks up on us gradually—but few people prepare for it. At first, many caregivers think they are alone in this role, and most are surprised to find out that there are so many others in the same situation. When people attend educational or support groups, they realize they are not alone and can share the challenges and rewards as well as ideas for coping and practical information on caregiving. This not only increases their identity as caregivers, but also can make them more understanding and supportive friends and advocates for other caregivers.

### Personal and Spiritual Growth

Reflecting on the caregiving experience, many people report a sense of accomplishment at sticking with caregiving despite confusion, stress and fatigue. Some report how much they have learned from the experience, from others, and from caregiver education classes. This can be very helpful in planning for one’s own future care needs. There are also quite a few people who report spiritual growth from the struggles they faced, the spiritual questions raised, and the meaning they drew from the experience.



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## Brought to you by members of the eXtension Family Caregiving Community of Practice

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