

25. Caring Responsibilities

Being diagnosed with cancer when you feel responsible for caring for someone else may seem like an impossible situation. It can certainly cause a great deal of worry. Carers include parents, who may be intensely concerned for the welfare of their children, or a partner or other relative of someone who is ill, elderly or disabled. And caring of course includes the care of pets. Carers very often understate their own needs in favour of those of the person they are caring for.

How can I manage my caring responsibilities?

Caring for an adult

- Are you the sole carer or are your responsibilities shared (e.g. with a sibling)? What other resources are available to you and the person you are caring for? Consider whether other members of your family or friends could help out.
- If you have no-one to assist in your caring responsibilities whilst you are receiving treatment there are several sources of help available (*see below*).
- It is worth considering whether the person you care for would be able to cope temporarily without your care. In this case you may wish to consider having a period of respite from your caring responsibilities. Try to identify and list what tasks have to be done for that person on a daily basis, etc.

Caring for a child

- Family, friends and neighbours are often the main source of support for many parents. They may be able to help with everyday things, for example looking after small children during the day, picking up the children from school if you have hospital appointments or looking after them in the holidays. Remember that most people are happy to be asked. In fact, they may already want to offer their support but are worried about interfering or offending you.
- You may decide to look into more formal childcare arrangements such as nurseries or crèches; playgroups, after school clubs and play schemes; child-minders, nannies and au pairs. You can find out more about childcare options through your local council's children's information service.

Caring in general

- Sometimes a better understanding of your treatment plans (i.e. duration, appointment times and what will be involved) can help you anticipate whether you will be able to continue the caring responsibilities or whether you will need to consider extra help. Please ask your medical team for advice about treatment plans.
- It might also be helpful for you to plan ahead to ensure you have some rest time (respite) from your responsibilities before treatment begins.
- If you have no one to assist in your caring responsibilities whilst you are receiving treatment there are government agencies and charities that can help (*see below*).
- Often the concern associated with being a carer can lead to anxiety or depression, worry, fear or anxiety, or guilt. Talking your worries through with family or friends can often help; alternatively speaking to a professional can also help. (There is further advice on these topics elsewhere in this directory.)
- The extra costs of childcare can be an additional worry but help is available (*see Finances, Work or Housing elsewhere in this directory*).
- If you need additional help you may find your local social services department helpful as they can assist with advice on child-care and caring services. Speak to your GP or the GP of the person you are caring for.