

# *Disability Campaign.org*

## Ideas for Caregivers



Photo: Polk Museum of Art

Caregivers may be relatives, friends, or professionals, but they all put effort into serving a person with a disability or special needs. If you are a caregiver, we want to thank you for all you do for others. As you seek to better care for the person you serve, we encourage you to take these tips and suggestions into consideration.

### *Ways to strengthen your relationship:*

1. **Be a good listener and supporter during a difficult period**, offering advice and counsel sparingly. Be sensitive to a varied process of adjustment.
2. **Take time to enjoy the friendship.** The fact you are there to talk and enjoy a patient or loved one's favorite activities with him/her is most important. Be consistent in caring and acceptance, during highs and lows.
3. **Find out about the patient's past, pastimes, favorite foods and hobbies.** Taking time to truly *know* the patient will show him/her the dignity and value each of us deserves. Ask questions about his/her wishes, preferences, accomplishments, traits and dreams. See him/her as a unique person, not a condition.

4. **Don't assume.** It is hurtful when you say, "I know just how you feel." Don't minimize, dispense with, or sum-up their pain in any way. "Get over it" or "Time Heals all wounds" are not expressions you should use. Instead, listen and acknowledge their pain or frustrations. Afterwards, ask how you can help alleviate some of that discomfort or offer suggestions.
5. **Be specific when you offer to help.** If you aren't, the person will be at a loss of what to take you up on. But if you say, "I'm on my way to the grocery store, what can I bring you?" he/she will have an opportunity to answer.
6. **Share your struggles.** When you are open, it frees the person to share his/her own struggles. You both will begin to relate to one another. Baring your own heart will lift a sense of distance and stiffness.
7. **Have good bedside manners.** Always ask if he/she would like you to step out when a doctor or nurse comes in. Ask questions about his/her comfort.
8. **Slow down and be content with silence.** Just being there is the greatest of all gifts. (And relaxing might be just what you need!)
9. **Don't be afraid of being stretched as a person.** Caring for someone else will test your patience and skill, but in the end, both of you may grow stronger individually and in your relationship.
10. **Keep your promises.** Show up when you say, and if you can't, make sure you call and explain. A patient and his/her family need stability and trust amidst turmoil and distress.
11. **Always be cheerful and hopeful.** A positive attitude is contagious. Relate stories of others who "made it." Envision a future event or hopeful outcome to which you can look forward—and never give up!
12. **Keep a sense of humor.** Things will go wrong, so learn not to take these circumstances too seriously. Nothing helps an embarrassing or impossible moment more than humor.



Photo: Harmony Home Health

*Creative Ideas for you to implement as you care:*

1. Give “memory” type gifts: a photo album, pictures, CDs, videos.
2. Write a storybook of key life events, a journal, or log.
3. Bring in the holidays with appropriate decorations or gifts.
4. Ask if you can help with a phone call, letter, message or delivery.
5. Bring in a special activity, game, or music.
6. Offer personal care, such as a manicure or an appointment with a barber.



Photo: Caregiving Cafe Blog

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