

Caring Responsibilities

When looking after everyone else leaves little space for you

Caring can involve love, commitment and meaning, while also being physically and emotionally exhausting.

You may be supporting a child, partner, parent, relative or another person with illness, disability, additional needs or increasing dependence. The responsibility can continue around the clock, even when nobody else can see it.

The load that other people may not see

Caring is rarely one task. It may involve appointments, medication, school or professional meetings, transport, meals, personal care, paperwork, advocacy, household responsibilities, emotional reassurance and constantly anticipating what might be needed next. Even when you are sitting down, your mind may still be planning, monitoring or listening.

Many carers also carry responsibility for keeping ordinary life running at the same time. Work, finances, relationships, siblings, housework and their own health do not disappear because somebody else needs care. This is why caring stress can develop gradually: there may never be a clear moment when the pressure began, only a growing sense that there is less and less space left for you.

Common pressures carers carry

Constant responsibility	Feeling that you must always be available, alert or ready to respond.
Appointments and systems	Managing healthcare, education, benefits, social care, forms, phone calls and professional communication.
Emotional responsibility	Trying to keep somebody else calm, safe, reassured or emotionally supported.
Interrupted rest	Sleep may be broken, time alone limited and genuine breaks difficult to arrange.
Financial pressure	Reduced working hours, additional costs, transport or changes in household income can add another layer of stress.
Guilt	Feeling guilty for being tired, frustrated, wanting time alone or considering your own needs.
Loss of identity	Life can become so organised around caring that it becomes difficult to remember what belongs to you as an individual.

When caring becomes overwhelming

Overwhelm may not always look like breaking down. It can look like becoming unusually irritable, forgetting things, feeling numb, losing patience, crying unexpectedly, struggling to make decisions or feeling resentful and then guilty for feeling resentful. You may notice that your own appointments, meals, sleep or social contact are repeatedly pushed aside because somebody else's needs feel more urgent.

These signs do not mean you do not care enough. They can indicate that the amount you are carrying has exceeded the recovery, practical help and emotional support available to you.

The guilt of needing a break

Carers can feel that taking time for themselves means taking something away from the person they support. But rest is not abandonment. Nobody can remain continuously available without cost. Even short, protected periods in which somebody else takes responsibility can allow the nervous system to come down from constant alertness.

Support does not have to mean giving up your role. It may mean sharing one task, asking another family member to attend an appointment, accepting practical help, using respite where available, speaking with a

carers' service or allowing somebody else to solve a problem without you overseeing every step.

Boundaries within caring

Caring relationships can make boundaries complicated, particularly when somebody genuinely depends on you. A boundary may therefore be small and practical: a protected hour, a time when another person handles calls, a task you no longer take responsibility for, or an agreement about what constitutes an emergency. The aim is not to stop caring; it is to make caring more sustainable.

A caring-responsibilities check-in

What am I currently responsible for?	
Which parts genuinely have to be done by me?	
What am I doing because I feel guilty saying no?	
What signs tell me I am reaching overload?	
Who could share one practical responsibility?	
What would give me even a small amount of space this week?	

Practical ways to reduce the load

Make the invisible visible. Write down everything you actually do in a week; the total can explain why you feel exhausted.

Share specific tasks. 'I need help' can be difficult for others to act on. 'Can you take them to Tuesday's appointment?' is clearer.

Keep essential information together. A single place for appointments, medication, contacts and care information can reduce the amount you have to remember.

Protect something that belongs to you. A walk, class, conversation, hobby or quiet half-hour can help preserve your identity outside caring.

Accept good-enough. When energy is limited, not everything can receive the same level of attention.

Ask about carers' support. Local authorities, carers' organisations, healthcare teams and charities may offer assessments, practical support, information or respite options.

Support in the UK

Carers UK provides information and support for unpaid carers. Carers Trust works with a network of local carer organisations. Your local authority can provide information about a carer's assessment, which looks at how caring affects your wellbeing and what support may help. A GP can also be told that you are a carer so this context is recognised when discussing your own health.

Further reading

The Selfish Pig's Guide to Caring by Hugh Marriott discusses the emotional reality of caring with humour and directness. **Already Toast** by Kate Washington explores the pressures placed on family caregivers.

Local carers' organisations may also provide guides tailored to specific caring situations.

A message

You can love someone deeply and still be tired of carrying so much. You can want to help and still need help yourself. You can be grateful for the person you care for and still grieve for parts of your own life that have changed. None of those feelings cancel the others out. Your needs do not stop mattering because somebody else's needs are greater. Making a little space for yourself is not stepping away from caring; it can be part of finding a way to continue.

Important: This resource provides general information and emotional support. Caring situations vary considerably. Seek appropriate health, social-care or safeguarding support where the person you care for, or you yourself, may be at risk.