

Caretaking vs. Caregiving

Some people try to overcompensate for their own neglect by being codependent with others. They become caretakers rather than caregivers. There are crucial differences between caretaking and caregiving and you will notice that the healthier and happier your relationship, the more you are caregiving rather than caretaking.

I view caretaking and caregiving on a continuum. We usually aren't doing both at the same time. The goal is to do as much caregiving as we can and to decrease our caretaking as much as we can.

Caretaking is a dysfunctional, learned behavior that can be changed. We want to change so we can experience more peace, more contentment and more fulfilling relationships. The people in your life may resist your healthier actions, but modeling caregiving is a huge gift you are giving to your loved ones.

Below are the ways you can begin to tell the difference between caretaking and caregiving.

1. Caretaking feels stressful, exhausting and frustrating. Caregiving feels right and feels like love. It re-energizes and inspires you.
2. Caretaking crosses boundaries. Caregiving honors them.
3. Caretaking takes from the recipient or gives with strings attached. Caregiving gives freely.
4. Caretakers don't practice self-care because they mistakenly believe it is a selfish act. Caregivers practice self-care unabashedly because they know that keeping themselves happy enables them to be of service.

5. Caretakers worry. Caregivers take action and solve problems.
6. Caretakers think they know what's best for others. Caregivers only know what's best for themselves.
7. Caretakers don't trust others' abilities to care for themselves. Caregivers trust others enough to allow them to activate their own inner guidance and problem solving capabilities.
8. Caretaking creates anxiety and/or depression in the caretaker. Caregiving decreases anxiety and/or depression in the caregiver.
9. Caretakers tend to attract needy people. Caregivers tend to attract healthy people.
10. Caretakers tend to be judgmental. Caregivers don't see the logic in judging others and practice a "live and let live attitude."
11. Caretakers start fixing when a problem arises for someone else. Caregivers empathize fully, letting the other person know they are not alone and lovingly asks, "What are you going to do about that?"
12. Caretakers start fixing when a problem arises. Caregivers respectfully wait to be asked to help.

As with changing any behavior, becoming aware of it is the first step. Watch yourself next time you are with someone and ask yourself where you fall on the continuum. It will take some work to change and you may experience some resistance and fear in the process—but what is on the other side is well worth the struggles of transformation.