

# FAMILY CONFLICTS IN CAREGIVING



**THE TRADE ASSOCIATION FOR SENIOR-SERVING PROFESSIONALS**



# Today's Speaker



Presenting will be Alan Dubow, President of NARC (National Association of Retirement Counselors). Widely regarded as among the foremost experts in the National Capital Area on care options for seniors, Alan, with extensive experience in the rehabilitation and long term care field, is responsible for ethics and continuing education programs for the entire industry. He has a degree in Psychology from Vassar College and Masters and Doctorate degrees from the University of Miami.



Conflict

Conflict within families

Internal conflict



# STUDIES

- *Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale*
- *Spielberger's State-Trait Anger Scale*
- *Bem Sex Role Inventory*
- *Personal Attributes Questionnaire*
- *Gender Role Conflict Scale*
- *Caregiving Satisfaction Scale*
- *Beck Depression Inventory*
- *State-Trait Anxiety Inventory*
- *Profile of Moods Scale*
- *Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory*
- *Brief Symptom Inventory*

Using studies with measurable outcomes enables us to look more closely at cause and effect and resolution.



# **COSTS OF CARE**

The national average cost of nursing home care is:

\$94,900/ year (2021) for a shared room; \$108,405 for a private room

Statewide, Virginia is slightly above the national average

*141% of the average annual household income (\$67,521)*





# WHO IS RECEIVING CARE?

- Care today is mostly being provided to members of **“The Greatest Generation”** or **“The World War II Generation.”**
- These are the **parents of the Baby Boomers**; therefore most have more than one adult child



# WHO ARE THE CAREGIVERS?

- About 34.2 million Americans have provided unpaid care to an adult age 50 or older in the last 12 months. [National Alliance for Caregiving and AARP. (2015).]
- The majority of caregivers (82%) care for one other adult, while 15% care for 2 adults, and 3% for 3 or more adults. [National Alliance for Caregiving and AARP. (2015).]
- Approximately 39.8 million caregivers provide care to adults (aged 18+) with a disability or illness or 16.6% of Americans. [Coughlin, J. (2010). Estimating the Impact of Caregiving and Employment on Well-Being: Outcomes & Insights in Health Management.]
- About 15.7 million adult family caregivers care for someone who has Alzheimer's disease or other dementia. [Alzheimer's Association. (2015).]



# CAREGIVING

- Caregiving is based on a relationship but it is an additional role that requires preparation, acceptance, support and resources.
- The caregiving role is complicated, bewildering and frustrating.





# WHO ARE THE FAMILY CAREGIVERS?

- Most Informal Caregivers are either spouses or adult children
- The generation currently receiving care typically have multiple children
- Even when the hands-on care comes from professionals, one of the adult children typically becomes responsible for choosing and supervising these professionals
- More often than not, the designated care supervisor is drafted by the others rather than volunteering and comes to the task with little knowledge or training



# CAREGIVER ISSUES

- Informal caregivers experience considerable stress and are at higher risk for poorer mental and physical well-being than non-caregivers
- Depressed caregivers are more likely than non-depressed caregivers to be the subjects of investigation by social service agencies for possible elderly mistreatment
- Caregivers may harbor resentment
- An exhausted or stressed caregiver can not provide the best care
- The strain of caregiving can put people at higher risk of dying



- Caregivers may resent care recipient's behavior that makes helping more difficult **[even if it's not a conscious act]**
- Caregivers may hide their anger from others in the family because they are ashamed or they are afraid of recrimination
- Spouses of depressed individuals commonly experience depression, dissatisfaction or anger



# Shame vs. Guilt

According to anthropologist Ruth Benedict:

- *Shame* is a violation of cultural or social values
- *Guilt* feelings arise from violations of one's internal values

Individuals prone to experiencing guilt are more likely to adopt constructive and prosocial conflict resolution strategies (*coping mechanisms*)

Individuals prone to experiencing shame are more likely to:

- Feel resentment
- Feel anger
- Blame others for negative events
- or **act aggressively towards others in the face of interpersonal conflicts**



# CAREGIVER REACTIONS

- approximately 2/3 of the elderly caregivers reported feeling angry or engaging in angry behavior toward their care recipient;
- higher depression scores were predictive of more frequent occurrences of PHB [**potentially harmful behavior**], regardless of demographics, interpersonal relationships, and care recipient illness severity...
- care recipients are at increased risk for PHB [**potentially harmful behavior**] particularly when their depressed caregivers are resentful about their caregiving responsibilities."
- many reported sufficient concern that their anger led them to seek formal services."



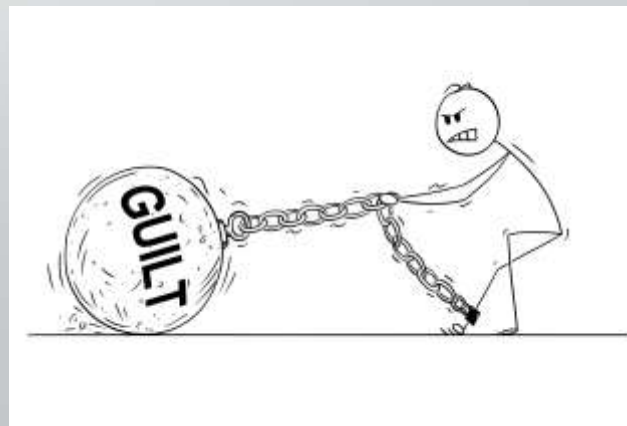
# TRENDS

- The demands facing caregiving are increasing
- More and more informal caregivers are thrust into the role unwillingly due to high cost of alternatives
- Many caregivers may be unfit for caregiving due to depression, resentment or personality issues



# GUILT TAKES CHARGE

- Families faced with caring for an aging parent should consult a professional care manager. Most don't, leaving the designated care supervisor to find their way blindly by trial and error.
- Eventually, the siblings on the sidelines start to feel guilty and want to "do something."
- Just going along doesn't feel enough like doing something, so they look for ways to make changes.
- This criticizes the existing care supervisor by implication, often pressuring her to return to aspects of the care plan that were previously tried and failed.



# HOW TO HELP

- Provide respite breaks for a caregiver
- Take a caregiver out to lunch
- Lend an ear
- Help a caregiver take meaning from the experience
- Keeping fit



# Stressful Spousal Caregiving Relationships

*Caregivers who perceive their relationship with the care recipient as positive and supportive report less care burden and fewer depressive symptoms.*

- Relationship loss is a recurrent issue for spouses:  
Loss of the care recipient as a unique person  
Loss of intimate connection  
Loss of a shared future"
- Role reversal is a source of stress:  
A spouse suddenly has to manage the money, balance the checkbook, cook
- Loss of dignity is a source of stress:  
A spouse is changing his loved one's diapers

- For care recipients with Alzheimer's disease, symptom progression was slower when "their caregivers described the care relationship as close and satisfying."
- When caregivers were more distressed and depressed, care recipients had a higher incidence of falls, more psychiatric symptoms, and earlier disability
- "A decline in the caregivers' sense of attachment to the care recipient increased the likelihood that the caregiver would end caregiving



# Effects of Suffering in Older Adult Caregiving Relationships

Family caregivers often experience

- Personal distress
- Impaired self care
- Increased psychological and physical morbidity  
...when caring for a close relative with a chronic disability

- patient pain intensity was the strongest predictor of caregiver depression
- spousal caregivers' mood was dependent on patient pain
- patient symptoms were strong predictors of patient depression which in turn predicted caregiver depression.

# Gender Issues

- Families tend to draft a daughter or daughter in law to supervise care rather than a son
- Female caregivers may be more affected by care recipients' suffering than are male caregivers
- Women are better than men at reading nonverbal expressions of emotion.
- Women are more likely to mimic others' facial expressions and posture
- Women are more likely to experience the emotions of others

44% of caregivers in the US are men [2000]

Male caregivers with traditional beliefs about masculinity are more likely to say that

- they are not feeling burdened
- they feel uncertain about caring
- They are more likely to articulate positive aspects to being a spousal caregiver than men with less traditional beliefs about masculinity
- Some men may view 'care' as feminized activity and may struggle to construe themselves in the caring role

# **Conflict Management Tips for Adult Families Dealing With Elder Care Issues**



# Conflict Challenges

- Conflict in the adult family context regarding elder care issues can be especially challenging
  - Difficult and emotional issues
  - Old dysfunctional communication patterns
  - Old grievances
  - Consequences of failure to manage well can be devastating
- Don't blame yourself if you don't instinctively handle conflict well
- Conflict, disagreement and strong emotions often trigger the innate fight or flight response, not a desire to sit down and calmly and rationally talk through a tough issue
- Popular culture does not offer many good examples of effective conflict management



# Conflict in a New Light

*Conflict is inevitable, but combat is optional.* -- Max Lucado

- Conflict is not the problem
- The way we manage conflict is the problem
- Learn to see conflict in a new light – as an opportunity
  - to deepen or repair relationships
  - to collaborate on problem solving
- The behavior we have the most control over is our own
- We have choices



# Conflict Management – Fundamental Questions

- 1) What do you want?
- 2) What are you doing to get it?
- 3) Is it working?
- 4) Do you want to try to figure out another way?



*The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.* – George Bernard Shaw

# Preparation

- Set high-stakes conversations up for success
- Clarify goals and intentions
- Intentions that tend to escalate conflict
  - Deliver a message or an ultimatum
  - Get others to agree with me
  - Figure out who is right and who is wrong
  - Show who is to blame
- Intentions that tend to diminish conflict
  - Gain a better understanding
  - Allow everyone to be heard
  - Problem solve through collaboration



*Human beings love to be right. When a person is willing to give up being right, a whole world of possibilities opens up. – Pete Salmansohn*

# Preparation – Be Grounded in Goodwill

*Whenever you're in conflict with someone, there is one factor that can make the difference between damaging your relationship and deepening it. That factor is attitude. – William James*

- Respect and value others' differing perspectives and needs
- Let go of negative judgments
- Don't believe everything you think;  
Be open to changing your own views
- Assumptions are often inaccurate and need to be verified
- Get in the habit of actively looking for others' good qualities, rather than focusing on all the ways they disappoint or irritate or fail to meet our needs



# Starting a Conversation

- The Harmonious Half Minute
- Start with curiosity about others' views and ideas
  - Less risk of provoking defensiveness
  - Others will be more willing to listen to your views if you have listened to their views first
  - Learn important information about other's motivation or ability to change views, behavior, or circumstances
- People change when two conditions are present: they are motivated and they are able

*The fool tells me his reasons. The wise man persuades me with my own.* – Aristotle





# Conversation Starting Technique

Three part conversation starting technique:

1. Share facts you have observed
2. Share your tentative conclusion
3. Ask for the other's views

Example:

*Dad, I have observed recently that you are walking more slowly, that your legs seem to freeze up unexpectedly sometimes, and Mother and Jim told me that you have had some falls recently. I am wondering whether a walker might help you get around better and more safely. Can you tell me more about how your mobility has been recently and whether you have considered using a walker?*



# Conversation Openers - Examples

- "I have something I'd like to discuss with you that I think is important to your health [wellbeing or safety]."
- "I'd like to describe my observations about \_\_\_\_\_, and then I want to hear your observations."
- "I have some views about this, but first I would like to hear your views."
- "I am assuming that \_\_\_\_\_. Do you have different assumptions?"
- "I need your help with something. Can we talk about \_\_\_\_\_ in the next week or so?" If they say yes, set a time.
- "I think we have different perceptions about \_\_\_\_\_. I'd like to hear your thinking on this and share my thinking so we can better understand where we each are coming from."
- "I'd like to talk about \_\_\_\_\_. I'd like for us to share our ideas on how to \_\_\_\_\_."
- "What is important to you about \_\_\_\_\_?"
- "How would \_\_\_\_\_ make things better for you?"

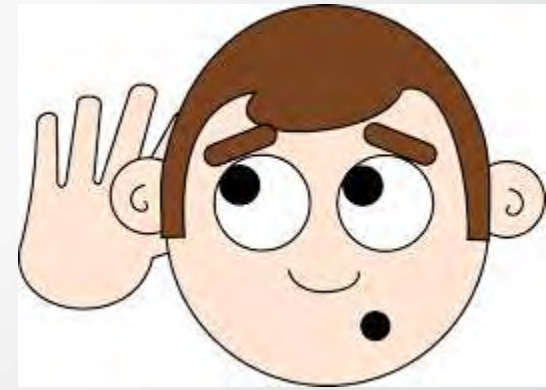


# Listening

*To say that a person feels listened to means a lot more than just their ideas get heard. It's a sign of respect. It makes people feel valued.*

— Deborah Tannen

- Very important skill to develop
- **Listening is not merely waiting to speak**
- Some reasons why effective listening is important
  - Gain a better understanding
  - Identify factors needed for good solutions
  - Connect with others, show respect, restore trust
- Listen to learn, not to rebut.



# Listening

## Level 1 and Level 2 Listening

(from *Co-Active Coaching* by Whitworth, Kimsey-House, and Sandahl, 2007)

- Level 1 Listening – self-focused
- Level 2 Listening – focused on speaker

Listening with empathy and a desire to understand the other's meaning, concerns, values, and emotions

### 3 things to listen for:

- Points to agree with
- Difficulties/emotions to acknowledge
- Efforts to appreciate



# OBJECTIVITY AND SUBJECTIVITY

*A direct statement about yourself is considered objective only if it is negative. If it's positive, it is considered subjective. And 'objective' means it is accurate, and 'subjective' means it is conceited self-delusion. - Popular Self-Help Author Barbara Sher*

- *The parties to a disagreement may have differing versions of “the truth” which they each sincerely believe*
- *These different beliefs can be an obstacle to reaching consensus*
- *The path over this obstacle is agreement on a factual framework under which everyone will agree to operate*

# BAGGAGE

- Family interactions are inevitably weighed down by the scars from past interactions
- Scars from past slights or other issues from childhood get in the way of the discussions that need to happen today
- Roles within the family, such as birth order, may create expectations regarding control that just don't fit the situation at hand.



# Handling Emotion

*Discussion is an exchange of knowledge; argument an exchange of emotion.* – Robert Quillen

- In times of conflict, strong emotions are inevitable
- They signal that something is important
- The goal is not to suppress emotion. Instead, acknowledge, accept, and manage emotion
- Emotion is separate from behavior
- We can choose how we behave in response to emotion



*People who fight fire with fire usually end up with ashes.*

– Abigail VanBuren

# Emotion – Your Choice

*The only people with whom you should try to get even are those who have helped you.* – John E. Southard

Techniques for managing our emotions:

Tip #1: Change your narrative

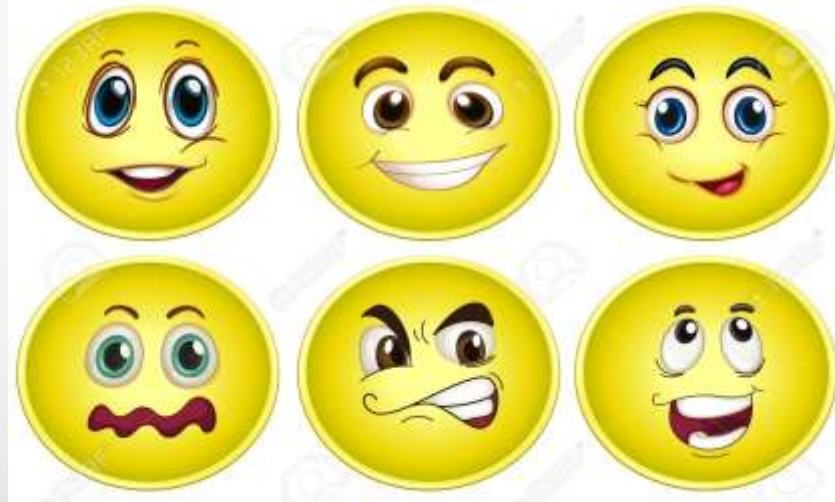
Tip #2: Pause before responding

Tip #3: Speak calmly

Tip #4: Focus on your breathing

Tip #5: Narrate (silently to yourself) your response and intention

Tip #6: Take a break





## Techniques for managing others' emotions:

- Tip #7: Use the “contrasting” technique to avoid triggering defensiveness
- Tip #8: Acknowledge the emotion and ask for additional information
- Tip #9: Retreat from your point if you sense a negative reaction
- Tip #10: Apologize

Do not offer faux apologies

Example of faux apology: *I am sorry you took that the wrong way.*

*Never ruin an apology with an excuse.* – Kimberly Johnson





# Managing Emotion - Humor

*Before you criticize someone, walk a mile in their shoes. That way, if they get angry, you are a mile away and they are barefoot.*

*- Author Unknown*

- Humor is a powerful tool for diffusing tension
- Best when specific to the moment and person
- Do not make fun of the person who is upset or trivialize feelings
- Okay to poke fun at yourself
- Agree ahead of time on a humorous signal you can use when things heat up
- Can be as simple as a funny word
- Does not have to be outrageously funny; just lighten the moment; momentarily interrupt the “drama”



# Questions – Put Them to Good Use

*The wise man doesn't give the right answers, he poses the right questions.* — Claude Levi-Strauss

Asking good questions is just as important as being a good listener

- Get information people might not otherwise share
  - Learn motivation and ability
  - Restore trust and respect
  - Find better solutions by testing assumptions
- Influence “stubborn” people; what appears as stubbornness can be lack of clarity or misinformation
  - Beware of “why” questions because they can appear challenging and put people on the defensive



# More About Good Questions

- Use questions to avoid expressly criticizing others' ideas
  - Identify your specific objections and turn them into questions
  - Speaker may surprise you by having ideas on how to overcome the hurdles you think exist
  - Use this technique when brainstorming solutions with a group
- End of life preferences – *a topic that should be asked about more often*
  - Have a family meeting so family members can get on the same page about the elder's wishes
  - The time to sort out whether everyone has the same understanding is not when there is a medical emergency



# Purposeful Questions - Examples

- **Gathering information about ability:**

*"It sounds like the thought of moving seems overwhelming to you. What would you like someone to help you with if it became necessary for you to make a move?"*

- **Correct misunderstandings:**

*"I thought I heard you say \_\_\_\_\_, did I understand you correctly?"*

- **Promote reflection:**

*"Mom, you mentioned that you have had a few dizzy spells recently, what would happen if you had a dizzy spell while you were driving?"*

*"I heard an interesting report on the news the other day [or "I read" or "a friend told me"] that \_\_\_\_\_. I wasn't aware of that. Did you know that?"*

- **Planning:**

*-- "Dad, if there ever came a time when you had to stop driving for safety reasons, and I hope it won't come to that anytime soon, what are some of the activities that you would want us to be sure that you could continue?"*

- **Rely on Allies:**

*-- "I understand that you don't think any change in X is necessary and I am not trying to make the decision for you. I just want you to have good information to base your decision on. Would it be helpful for you to ask your doctor/minister/trusted friend for his/her opinion so that you can consider that when making your decision?"*

# Be Practical

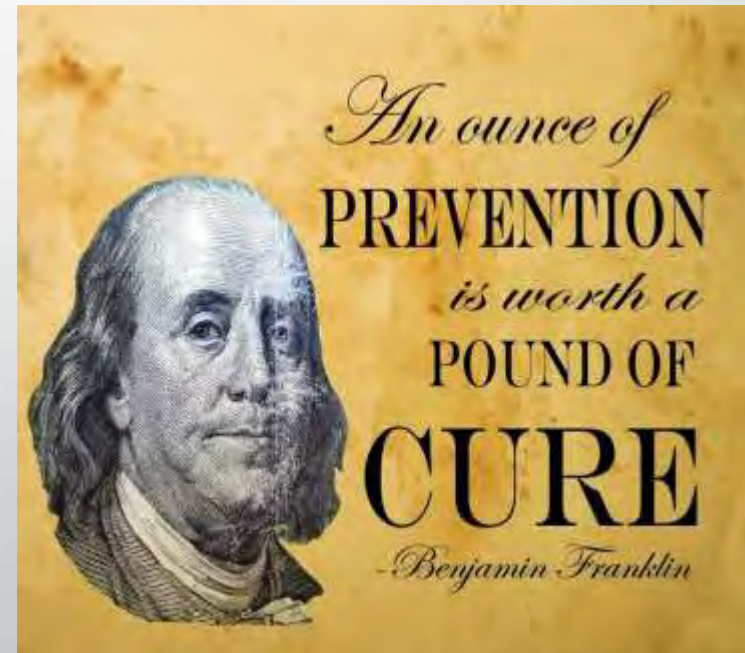


- Expect to have multiple conversations about difficult issues.
- Expect a bumpy road at times. Articulate an optimistic vision regarding the ability to collaborate.
- Do not assume that an initial negative response is the final response. People need time to process change. Let people know that you are available when they are ready to talk.
- People will have an easier time changing their minds or approaching you to speak further if you remain positive, encouraging, non-judgmental, and forward thinking.

# AN OUNCE OF PREVENTION

The best way to resolve conflict is to avoid it. These simple steps can help:

- Engage a professional Care Manager as early as possible and let the Care Manager propose a care plan
- **NEVER NEVER NEVER** confer joint authority on multiple people. This is very tempting for parents who want to treat their children equally but it is asking for trouble. Accomplish this by giving each sibling full responsibility for separate tasks of equal importance.





# PROFESSIONAL ETHICS: IMPARTIALITY

Avoid taking sides in family disputes. It is the obligation of the Retirement Counselor to facilitate access for all family members to the senior and information about care except to the extent that it violates the privacy rights of the senior or presents a risk to the safety of the senior.





# PROFESSIONAL ETHICS: ABUSE

All suspected abuse must be promptly investigated and reported to Adult Protective Services or other proper authority. Having a suspicion proven wrong is not a negative outcome; failing to halt ongoing abuse is.



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