

## **Workshop VII**

## **SPOUSE TO CAREGIVER**

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Let's begin this discussion with one question: how will caregiving your spouse deepen your connection? Is it possible to do some things and not others? Having limits and boundaries is crucial. Please think about this. There are many different ways to question your choices or make better decisions. I strongly believe that you will feel better if you first address this one very important question.

Is it possible to still be a spouse while being a caregiver? This is a big question and one that we all almost certainly encounter. I want you to simply sit with this question for a moment or two. Is it possible to be a caring spouse while choosing not to be his or her caregiver? I want you to simply sit with this question for another moment or two. There are no simple answers to these questions however I do believe strongly that you will benefit by turning your thoughts to some of what all may be involved.

One, is your spouse encountering a life circumstance that is acute (temporary) or is it chronic (life-long)? There are different strategies and resources available to you and your spouse depending upon the answer to this question so it behooves you to spend a moment to decipher the answer. By the way this can change over time so keep it somewhat flexible. Maybe the two of you even have living wills which can be quite helpful.

Two, given that you cannot "fix" your spouse's situation, what do you feel comfortable accessing for them? Think about this please. Perhaps it is family or friends or work or a therapist or the medical profession or an agency such as the Family Caregivers' Network or a disease-focused society such as the Cancer Society or the Parkinson's Society or maybe even a lawyer. People differ substantially in what they might do for their spouse? What does your spouse believe is warranted? There is no right or wrong per se but facing these questions can help you bring about a much-needed support system early on.

Three, given that you are not nor are ever going to be a 100% perfect spouse, what resources do you feel comfortable accessing for yourself? Again, this is very important to reflect upon earlier rather than later. Perhaps it is family or friends or work or a therapist or the medical profession or an agency such as the Family Caregivers' Network or a disease-focused society such as the Cancer Society or the Parkinson's Society. Remember you and your spouse are a unit and each of you has differing needs and comfort levels. There is no right or wrong per se.

Four, I believe you will benefit by facing your beliefs surrounding the rights and responsibilities or being a spouse. Have you and your spouse had the opportunity to talk about your understandings of what is expected? Perhaps you thought one thing and then found yourself unwilling or unable to do what you think should be done. There is no right nor wrong although it is important to realize that resentments can easily build or frustrations arise if you don't contemplate your realities. Conversations help enormously. Sometimes this is not possible so figuring out how to handle this situation well is imperative. Again there is no right or wrong way per se but what continues to fit well with your values and beliefs and community.

Five, what parts of your spousal relationship can you give up to a caregiver or helper and what parts do you and your spouse want to keep separate and in effect sacred? It will always be easier if you and your spouse communicate well and keep current with your development. Even if you haven't I urge you consider what is important to you and your well-being.