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PAUKTUUTIT
INUIT WOMEN OF CANADA

Taking Care of Yourself – Having Healthy Boundaries

Caring for ourselves has to be the first priority. If we get too tired, and fall asleep, the dogs don't get fed, the caribou pass by, we could be in danger from the cold. It's the same with caregiving: if we don't rest and share the work with others, we will get too tired to go on.

Sky Patricia Bellefleur,
 Native Friendship Centre of Montreal

Rita Myers of Tapestry House in Ottawa – an agency whose role is to support informal caregivers – made a presentation to the Urban Inuit Family Caregivers Workshop on May 24-25, 2006. Here is some of the information she presented to the group and some ideas and suggestions group members provided to help us take better care of ourselves when we are caring for others.

A caregiver
 provides ongoing care and assistance, without pay, to family members or friends in need of support due to learning or thinking disorders and problems of the body, mind or spirit.

When we are responsible for caring for someone full-time, it's hard to say "no" when we've had enough, when we need a break, when we think the one being cared for could be doing more for themselves.

On the other hand, sometimes when we get frustrated or our needs haven't been met for a long time, we say "no" too readily. We can shut people out, or suddenly stop doing the things we have always done for them, and think only of ourselves.

What we need to have is appropriate **boundaries** so we don't give too much to others or too little. We need balance between their needs and our needs.

Sometimes we treat caregiving like a 100 metre sprint when we should treat it like a long distance run. We need to sustain ourselves for the long haul.

Rita Myers, Tapestry House,
 Ottawa



A boundary is knowing....

- where you end and where someone else begins
- what you're responsible for and what you're not
- what is your need and what is someone else's need¹.

The Importance of Boundaries

How do we feel when our boundaries (what we are comfortable doing or being) are threatened? Inuit caregivers in the workshop told us this.

- *When I reach my boundary, it's "the end of the line."*
- *Boundaries are learning to say "No!"*
- *Boundaries are warning systems when personal space is invaded.*
- *I try to set personal limits and stick to them.*
- *I get a feeling in the pit of the stomach when boundaries are breached.*

Some examples of boundaries are:

- having one night out a week
- cooking freely for your kids but not all their friends
- not getting pulled down by someone's addictions
- knowing when you have reached your limit of caring and taking a break

We grew up caring for our own people. No-one questions whether we will care for family members who need it. Our families come first. But if we give too much, everyone suffers.

Yvonne Camsell, caregiver,
Edmonton, Alberta

Boundaries are important so that:

- we don't feel resentful about what we do
- we make conscious decisions about helping others
- we put ourselves first some of the time
- others know what to expect from us.

Some Questions to Think About

Here are some questions to help you think about setting boundaries.

1. How did you experience boundaries when you were growing up?
2. Were the boundaries set by your mother or father very loose or very rigid?
3. How have cultural values affected your boundaries?
4. How do you feel about the boundaries you set for yourself?

¹ Developed by Tapestry House, Ottawa, 2001.