Understanding and Navigating Resistance: Helping Elders and their Families

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“I’m overwhelmed and I don’t know where to begin!”

most caregivers
DEFINING RESISTANCE

Resistance is:

- A way we try to stay in control
- Prevents us from having to make decisions we don’t want to make
- Helps us to feel more empowered
- Supports denial
- Is in direct conflict with change
“What you try to resist, persists”
UNDERSTANDING OUR OWN RESISTANCE

Our own resistance is a:

• Way we cope with our challenges
• Knee jerk reaction to change
• Way for us to NOT make decisions
• Way to maintain the status quo, even if the status quo is not healthy or comfortable
• To keep us busy and distracted from what we need to do
WHY CAREGIVERS STRUGGLE WITH RESISTANCE

Because they:

- Feel out of control
- Are Fearful and Afraid
- Want things and their caregiver to remain the same
- Are concerned their situation could get worse
- Believe they have to make the “right” decision
- Are overwhelmed and exhausted
- Are in denial
- Frustrated with their situation
“A great deal of resistance is just not knowing”

Eleanor Roosevelt
You Learn By Living
REASONS CAREGIVERS STRUGGLE WITH RESISTANCE

- Guilt
- Sadness
- Anger
- Family history
- Family conflict
- Families don’t know how to move forward
- Unwillingness to “let go” or recognize that the person has changed
- Unfinished business
REASONS CAREGIVERS STRUGGLE WITH RESISTANCE cont...

- They feel pressure from outside sources
- They are afraid the care recipient will decline more quickly if someone else takes care of him/her
- They struggle with loss and the impending death of the care recipient
- If the elder has dementia, they may be in denial that there is a problem
“The basic human need to continue being ‘who I am’ is perhaps the most important”

Burger, Fraser, Hunt & Frank

Nursing Homes: Getting Good Care There
WHY ELDERS RESIST

Those *without* dementia:

- Desire to be independent
- Be in control
- Desire to not be a “burden”
- Denial that they need help or have a problem
- Depression
- Self-esteem and humility
- Generational differences (roles, privacy etc.)
- Experience your help as interfering
WHY ELDERS RESIST

Those *with* dementia:
- Don’t understand that they need help
- Misunderstand what is being communicated to them or forget what was said
- Our approach when trying to provide care or communicate with them
- Their personality
- Fear
- Embarrassment
- Feel they are being talked down to or being controlled
“If there is no struggle there is no progress”

Fredrick Douglass
MOST COMMON ISSUES TO NAVIGATE THROUGH

- To move or not to move your care recipient
- When to take the car away
- When the care recipient needs care and refuses
- Refusal to go to the doctor
- Financial control
- Spousal issues
- Dementia
- Family conflict
- End of life
IMPORTANT CONCERNS TO CONSIDER

- Assess for safety (home environment and neighborhood)
- Elders ability to care for oneself (physical, psychological and cognitive)
- Cognitive ability
- Resources available (financial and community)
- Support (family, friends, spouse, religious or spiritual)
“Sometimes we are so focused on a certain path or goal that we fail to notice that the solution to our problem cannot be found on the path we are feverishly pursuing”

Naomi Levy

To Begin Again
STRATEGIES TO CONSIDER

- First and foremost, elders need to feel that they are being heard
- Validate their feelings
- Find a way to help them feel in control
- Consider how to help them still feel they have a role or purpose
- Think about who the elder respects or listens to the most
- Consider “therapeutic lying”
TIPS FOR KEEPING YOUR SANITY

- Try not to personalize
- Become more mindful of what buttons of yours get pushed and when they are pushed... pause...
- Be willing to not get too attached to the outcome
- Don’t argue
- Let go of entrenched beliefs and expectations
- See if you can tap into humor
- Be compassionate toward yourself
“There is no right or wrong way to provide care, only a mindful way”

Nancy L. Kriseman

The Mindful Caregiver: Finding Ease in the Caregiving Journey