

dropping by, keep caring. You don't have to commit to a long night out – just a quick hug to remind your friend that she isn't alone.

**Ask specific questions.** If your friend is caregiving, some good questions to ask are: “What’s the latest with your Mom? How has she been doing lately?” When friends ask the more open-ended question “How’s your mom?” it just reminds her that her mom is doing badly. Chances are that the news is not good so adding a “lately” to the question about how mom is doing allows the person to answer about what’s new or different, good or bad. And, while you’re at it, ask your friend how SHE’S doing. She’ll get a lot of questions about her sick loved one but she’s less likely to get questions about how she’s holding up and what she needs. With these questions, you can take care of your friend while she’s taking care of her loved one.

**Discourage perfectionism.** Let’s face it: for most of us, our primary emotion is guilt. That’s especially true when we’re dealing with our parents because very frail people have A LOT of needs.... And as caregivers, we have a tendency to feel like we’re supposed to meet all their needs, all the time. ***Our dilemma is that the very same person whose approval we’ve been seeking our whole life is now asking for more than we can possibly give.*** This is why it’s a good rule of friendship to always remind each other that we can’t do the impossible. We can’t fix the frailties of our parents’ body and mind. We can, however, be each other’s touchstone through it all.

**Recognize the effects of grief.** If your friend’s parent has dementia or Alzheimer’s, she’s going to be feeling an especially complicated grief. Understand that she’s living in a twilight zone where her parent is here but not here. This isn’t the kind of grief that she’ll get over. It’s the kind that’ll soak into her skin and hang on for the long haul.

In the face of grief like this, Pauline Boss, author of Loving Someone with Dementia: How to Find Hope While Coping with Stress and Grief, says that the best response is **“I’m so sorry.” That’s it.**



## Essential Dos and Don'ts for Friends Of Caregivers

***Don't judge.*** We need to 100% avoid the urge to judge. Judging is always good for a cheap and easy self-esteem boost but it's poisonous to friendship. So, when your friend says she has to put her parent in a facility, avoid the urge to criticize at all costs. If possible, don't even do it in your own head. **Because unless you've chased down a person with Alzheimer's wandering the halls at night, changed an adult diaper or given up your job to care for a parent, you really can't evaluate your friend's decision to seek more help.**

***Especially don't judge feelings.*** Particularly negative ones. In caregiving, they come with the territory. One of the most commented on articles that I've shared on Facebook is a HuffPost article by Ann Brenoff entitled, "*No, Caregiving is Not Rewarding. It Sucks.*" Based on comments, it seems this is a sentiment that is shared by many but that also causes a great deal of shame. The bottom line is — we may be doing amazing things for our parents BUT ALSO hating every minute of it. These are not mutually exclusive. Duty does not require joy.

***Don't avoid the caregiving topic.*** This topic is still too much of a taboo in our society. If you know someone who is caregiving, ask her about it. If it's you, don't hide it — by bringing it out into the open, you'll find a surprising number of "me toos", which are always so healing. "*Friendship is born at the moment when one person says to another, 'What you too? I thought I was the only one.'*" — **C.S. Lewis**

***Don't take it personally.*** It's really hard to be a good friend when you're caring for an aging parent. Your friend may forget your birthday, cancel plans at the last minute, or go silent for months. She may forget to ask you how you're doing or complain nonstop about her situation. This isn't much fun but it has nothing to do with how she feels about you.

***Stay connected.*** There are about 40 million people out there taking care of a loved one and yet they all feel like they're completely alone. The lack of natural connecting points in the community make it all too easy to become isolated. Friends, you may be feeling shut out but it's so important to keep the connections flowing on both sides: keep texting, keep calling and

