

Dear Esther August 2021

Dear Esther,

For two years I have been caring for my husband, who has dementia, in our home. We have two grown children who live out of state and try to help when they can. I am struggling with finding joy in our lives right now. I have always been able to maintain a positive attitude, but it seems to escape me now. The monotony of daily life is difficult. Will I ever be able to find joy again?

Searching for Joy

Dear Searching for Joy,

Just reading about your current situation evoked heavy feelings for me, so I can't imagine how intense this must be for you. First, I want to acknowledge your ability to recognize and own your feelings as this is half the battle. Not having any joy in your lives can quickly lead to despair so you are right to be concerned.

Is joy a feeling, a state of being or an attitude? I would argue that it is all three. Your current situation may not lend itself to big joys in your life right now but perhaps you can focus on finding smaller ones. You can try to focus on the small successes with your husband, admire the beautiful flowers on your way to the mailbox and focus on the taste of a delicious food. Let yourself smile or laugh out loud at the small things in life. Find a television series that you enjoy and escape for an hour or two on a regular basis. And when you really need a good laugh, there is always YouTube videos of all sorts.

I would also urge you to find support from other people in similar situations. JFS has a free caregiver support group where caregivers come together to share a meal, have an opportunity to talk about their situation and support each other. There is nothing more affirming and comforting than talking with someone who is experiencing the same thing as you are. If you do not have any help caring for your husband, I would suggest that you consider part-time in-home or respite care and use the time to do something for yourself. Engage in an activity that is enjoyable or soothing to you. Look at the time as an opportunity to refresh emotionally.

Mindfulness exercises that focus on being aware and accepting your situation (without judgement) can be useful. You have been a mother and wife for many years. Now it is time to give yourself the same loving care. Be gentle with yourself, look for and recognize the small joys, create and utilize your support system and never stop paying attention to the way you feel. It's okay to feel whatever emotion you have. You are not alone in this. A recent study found that one in five people provide unpaid family care. That is 53 million caregivers in the United States according to AARP research.

My hope for you is that in the middle of your day, you will begin to find small joys that will warm your heart and lighten the load. If you need further assistance with resources, feel free to reach out to one of us at JFS who can assist you. And email me your address and I will bring you a cup of my famous Matza Ball Soup the next time I make a pot. It is sure to bring a little joy to your stomach and heart!

Jul 27, 2021

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