



Feeling Helpless: Understanding and Protecting Yourself

The sense of helplessness is different for each individual and each situation: therefore, each person can be of help to another person.

I feel powerless about my ability to influence the context or the situation, but I am not powerless about my own ability to act (or react).

Feelings of helplessness are part of the human condition, throughout life. Helplessness must therefore be considered and accepted as a normal, variable, and evolving sentiment, otherwise it may lead to negative thoughts and inappropriate behaviors.

So, how can we stay in good psychological health during our companionship journey?

This sheet will provide you with tips and advice to put into practice, at your own pace.

We wish you instructive reading!

Little Brothers

Source: *Faire face au sentiment d'impuissance*
– Notes by Henri-Philippe GODEAU (see the Additional Resources section for more information)

Reflections and possible solutions

Do you feel like you've tried everything, and nothing seems to work? Are you confronted by your companion's limits and feeling unable to act? Do you tend to impose your own solutions? It is possible to look at things differently!

A few suggestions:

- Look at the situation objectively;
- Question and respect your limits;
- Review your expectations;
- Recognize the strengths of each individual;
- Get help;
- Let time take its course.



Good practices

- Show self-empathy, stay connected to your own state of mind, your emotions and your physical well-being;
- Observe the situation and keep an emotional distance;
- Stay open, sensitive and flexible;
- Ask yourself how you can be of use;
- Trust in the elder's abilities;
- Vary your approaches (visits, phone-calls, e-mail, letters) and stay constant in the relationship;
- Take note of your positive impact, your strengths and your creativity;
- Take breaks, go for walks, keep up activities that recharge your batteries;
- Accept that you will not have the answers for every situation and consult a professional;
- Refer your companion to specialized services if necessary: you can't know everything!



Attitudes to adopt



- Keep in mind that your heartfelt presence and your empathy make a big difference.
- Respect your limits: take the time to identify the other person's needs and possible alternatives for your support,
- Know when to consult. As a volunteer, you are not alone: your coordinator is available to gather information about your companion's health and can provide you with perspective and support for challenges you may encounter. Share your observations and your feelings.
- As a caregiver, refer to qualified staff.
- Find out about any unusual situations or changes in the senior's life.



Things to be avoided

- Taking the person's problems and emotions upon your shoulders;
- Feeling that you have to find a solution for everything;
- Wanting to settle everything at the same time;
- Making decisions for someone else.

Additional resources

Online

Société française d'accompagnement et de soins palliatifs, *Faire face au sentiment d'impuissance!*, <https://bit.ly/face-au-sentiment-impuissance>, (Notes d'Henri-Philippe GODEAU) (in French only).

Simplement Humain, *Dépasser le sentiment d'impuissance*, [blogue] <https://bit.ly/sentiment-impuissance> (in French only).

Johanne De Montigny, *Ce vif de la vie qui ne meurt jamais*, [vidéo] <https://bit.ly/vif-qui-ne-meurt-jamais>, Éditions Novalis (in French only).

BROWN Brene, *Le power of vulnerability*, [vidéo] https://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_the_power_of_vulnerability, Youtube.

Reading

DROLET Jean-Louis, *La route du sens*, Les Éditions Québec-Livres, 2017.