

# The Uncensored Caregiver Podcast

with Master Certified Coach Iryna Ishchenko

## Episode 36:

### What if you don't want to bring your parents with dementia over for the holidays?

Iryna Ishchenko [00:00:00]:

Here is the scenario a lot of caregivers going through these days. Your parent is in the specialized facility because they can't live alone anymore, and the question of you bringing them over for the holiday dinner inevitably comes up. You love your parent, and you cherish your memories of the family holidays. But when you think of everything that comes with bringing them over, like assisting them with their toileting needs, answering the same question slowly and loudly, again and again, or pretending you don't notice their sexually obsessive behavior. You understand that you don't want to have all of that at the holiday dinner. You can deal with that, and you know how on any other day of the year, but not on this day. Because it's a sure recipe for your holiday to be ruined. Let's talk about it.

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Logically, you understand it's better not to bring your elder over. You know you need a break, and your family deserves to enjoy the holiday dinner. But the guilt and fear of disappointing either the elders or the rest of the family are loudly present, which makes perfect sense. No matter how well we are developed as human species, we still have that primitive need to belong to a group and to be accepted by the group. Belonging means surviving. When we are accepted by the group, we have people who are committed to helping us to survive, and we are committed to helping them to survive. It's a beautiful arrangement, if you think of it. A relationship where we watch for each other, take care of each other, protect, and provide, and feed, and keep each other warm, and help each other in all possible ways.

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Belonging is a very primal survival instinct, no matter how evolved we are. Parents or the eldest of the group are usually the authority figures, and we don't want to disappoint or upset them because they are the decision makers in the group. We are programmed to belong, and our brains interpret displeasing the authority, aka parents, as a very real possibility not to survive if we don't belong to our group, if we are being kicked out of this group. That fear of upsetting the parents is wired in us. And if this is what you experience, there is nothing wrong with you. You are just a normal human. Congratulations. Now, let's think how we can take share charge of our decisions, including the decision not to bring the Asian family member with dementia over for the holidays.

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First of all, we don't really know if our family member with dementia is going to be disappointed if we don't bring them over because we don't know what they're going to think about it. And the way how we feel depends on what we think. They might be upset because they expect to be present at the dinner and that didn't happen. That's a possibility. They also might be relieved that they don't have to go anywhere because such a trip would be exhausting for them. That's also a possibility. There is also a possibility, like with my mother-in-law, that your relative might be already living in their own reality and not being aware of the holidays in general, and they won't have a reason to be upset. Okay? Second, I want you to answer the question of what it would cost you to bring them over.

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And they mean not just a monetary cost, but the cost of your emotions, your physical, and your mental well-being too. What does bringing them over creates in your life? Joy, connectedness, peace, harmony, or stress and anxiety, exhaustion, and feeling disconnected from the rest of the family. Are you going to be crying in your bathroom because you wanted to have a happy family time, and it turned out to be a disaster,

and everyone is upset and tired. Will you need to have physical therapy after assisting your parent and moving them around. Will you be anticipating what is going to go wrong and who is going to be upset more during the family dinner instead of having an engaging conversation. Those are the costs too. Now What I'm not doing and what I'm not creating in my life when I experience those emotions and spend time crying and attending physical therapy. How much time do you spend worrying about what to do and how much time you would cry.

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Let's say it would be 10 hours during the week before the holidays and 2 hours on the night after the event. What could you do at that time if you didn't worry and didn't cry? Have some extra sleep, being present with your children. Add that to your costume. And finally, let's think what it would cost you if your family member with dementia is disappointed because they don't attend the holiday celebration with you and your family. It might also be stressed and not being able to sleep at night and worrying, maybe even the same number of hours, that are lost. But when you look at the whole picture and see the costs, you can make a decision what kind of frustration you are choosing for yourself. The frustration of not having the holiday celebration you want with your family, or the frustration of seeing your family member with dementia being upset and disappointed that you didn't do what they expected of you. There is no correct answer here, by the way.

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Whatever you choose is the best choice as long as you are aware of what you're choosing. Now, take a deep belly breath and say aloud, I am a good person. No matter what decision you are making, you are a good person. And if you decided not to bring the fat that family member over, how do you tell them about it? Keep it simple. Tell them what you will do. For example, We will come to visit and celebrate on Saturday morning. The kids will come and whatever is going to happen, or the day after. Keep the focus on what will happen, what you will be doing, who is coming, and when it's going to happen.

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And keep the explanations of why and your apologies for your perceived, fear of disappointing them behind. That's not necessary. And remind yourself, you cannot fix everything. Remind yourself what you can do comfortably without resentment and drain. And if you need a reminder for that, you can find the link to my list of 10 things to remember in the description of this episode. And marry everything to you. Thank you for being with me. I'm master Certified Coach, Iryna Ishchenko, and I'm sending you all my love.