

# Healing the Caretaker

by [Dr. Marianne Rolland](#)

Who is the caretaker? At first glance most people would probably identify the characteristics of a caretaker as positive. In fact, many caretakers find it hard to change their patterns of care taking because of how much positive attention they get for their constant attention to other people's needs. On the surface caretakers are caregivers; those who give care. But in reality a caretaker takes from another the opportunity to learn to care for themselves. More on this later. Caretakers may be and often are sensitive, compassionate, empathic, deep feelers, problem solvers, good listeners and intuitive. Caretakers often value these qualities in themselves, but more often in others and come to rely on the praise and acknowledgment from friends, family and colleagues for being such 'strong, selfless people.' In addition to care taking family and friends they may be drawn to professional work in the areas of counseling, social work or social and environmental activism. Basically, they feel the noble call to help others.

So why would a person such as this need healing? The answer is that the deeper and often subconscious motivation for these 'selfless' behaviors is often a denial of self. The caretaker is the caregiver who gives to others to escape him or herself. It is much easier to focus all of one's attention on another's 'problems' than to face the truth of our relationship with ourselves. Focusing on others offers a very powerful distraction from our own feelings. In this way the caretaker denies him or herself. The caretaker will, in martyr-like fashion, regularly sacrifice and compromise their own self-care and nurturing in order to attend to the needs of others. In this way care taking can be thought of as an addiction (see [Healing Addictions](#)). The caretaker is lying to himself. He can easily become very comfortable in the self image of the noble crusader out to save the world, when in reality what is being created is a deepening rift within as the caretakers own feelings are persistently ignored, stuffed, belittled, devalued and denied.

The caretaker betrays himself. This self-sacrifice often has roots in an exaggerated sense of responsibility for other people. It is common for deeply sensitive, compassionate and empathic people who can actually tune into and feel the feelings of others to feel at fault for other people's feelings and particularly their pain. For example, those who have been wounded by being abandoned may feel extremely sensitive to another feeling abandoned by them. To compensate the caretaker will take on the other person's 'stuff', i.e., fears, concerns, worries, phobias, and make it their mission to alleviate that person's suffering. On the surface this is a beautiful intention, but because the underlying motivation is to escape the feelings connected to the caretakers own experience with abandonment, what's really happening is a form of emotional escapism.

The other likely outcome of this relationship is that the caretaker will eventually become resentful of the one who they're out to save. For, in truth, we only have the power to heal ourselves, so the caretaker will give a tremendous amount of energy to this other person to discover that nothing changes. For unconsciously, the caretaker sees himself in those that he would save and attempts to soothe and alleviate his own pain by focusing on theirs. This, of course, doesn't work and the caretaker is left with the feeling that he loves and cares for everybody and nobody cares for him. Ultimately, this is only a projection of the caretaker's lack of self-love. We must acknowledge, honor and ultimately accept our own feelings if we are to heal. When we focus on and take responsibility for another person's feelings all that happens is the one "being saved" develops a dependency on the caretaker and is stripped of the opportunity to develop their own capacity to heal themselves. The caretaker resents the dependency because he is unaware that he created it. Unaware that he helped to create it in the first place and feeling a victim to his perceived moral obligation and compulsion to focus on others, the caretaker

finds a reason to feel sorry for himself and indulge in self pity. Eventually due to the likely presence of shame, guilt and strong self-judgment the caretaker will judge himself for feeling sorry for himself and then absolve himself or find salvation in what he sees as the selfless concern for and care of others. The cycle begins again.

The [Core Emotional Healing](#) process is about allowing ourselves to feel our own feelings, whatever they may be. For the caretaker, the truth may contain feelings of being undeserving of the attention from ourselves that is necessary to heal. The caretaker may be very resistant to "going there" and feeling their feelings because "there's no time for me. What about everyone else? I'm fine." For the caretaker fixing others can be a way of creating a sense of control and power. The Core Emotional Healing process dissolves those illusions. The caretaker begins to see that they have been so uncomfortable with other people feeling their feelings only to the extent that they have been afraid of their own feelings. Each person's journey is his or her own. It begins with a deep breath and the permission to self to feel all the way.