



Caregivers Wellness Workshop Handout – Key Points
Presented By: Dr. Carla Winters
March 2022

Important: Know when to seek professional help!

Adults - we are a product of our experiences - nothing that works for everyone

- Know yourself to: Figure what you need
- Know tools to: Find how to address it

Caregiver Personality - take on the worries of others, compassionate, easily guilted

Caregiving Complexities: conflicting emotions, typically found at the extremes of our ranges

Myth: Self-Reliance

- We are all born needing care, will need care through our full lives, will typically die needing care from others
- Societal pressures (real or self-imposed) – to tough it out

Pandemic has changed us

- Increased our (collective) anxiety
 - Anxiety – overwhelming fear of the future
- When we feel isolated, our brain snaps into self-preservation mode
 - State of hyperarousal
 - Increased anxiety about anticipation of reductions in social contact

Brain – Resists Change

- When stimulus – brain looks for information – if met with uncertainty (as in pandemic) – enters into worry mode – begins anxiety cycle
- Uncertainty – feeds fear; fear leads to anxiety
 - Fear of the future makes it harder for us to plan
 - Important to understand because it can very quickly become paralyzing
 - Paralyzing energy is a direct path to burnout and health issues

Why Wellbeing matters:

- Manifestations of stress/anxiety in the body
- Threat to mental health
- Impact on longevity

MISSION: Promote the independence, dignity and wellness of homebound elderly and people with disabilities by matching them with supportive and caring volunteers who assist with the tasks of everyday life.

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Physical Wellbeing

- Low-level fight or flight all the time
 - Chronic state of mild inflammation
 - Contributes to high blood pressure, obesity, and more
- Long-term damage of remaining like that – measurable changes
- Magnified by pandemic
 - Physical cues from our body – neck, shoulders, expressions
 - Diaphragmatic breathing
 - Exercises & stretches to relieve muscle knots/stress

Mental Wellbeing

- Bank account analogy
 - Making deposits - not self-indulgent; money is good; need to pay bills
 - Beginning balance can vary each day
 - Consider stresses a series of deposits vs. withdrawals
 - Pandemic – shifted the balance in deposits and withdrawals (taxes/fees)
- Reflect on What is Bothering You: Name what it is
 - What you can control - what you can't control
 - How can you budget your resources in response?
- What fills you up? What is a replenishing payment for you? Do more of that!
- Push “pause” in your daily routine
- Mindfulness apps/exercises don't work without acceptance
 - Seeing experiences with non-judgment, openness, and receptivity
 - Accepting your feelings doesn't mean accepting the circumstances
 - Get comfortable with your uncertainty
- We CAN NOT eliminate many stresses; we CAN change the ways we view ourselves

Concept of Self-Compassion

- As a field of study
- Positive correlation with overall mental health
 - **Worksheet Exercise**
- Increases our emotional resilience; improves our health, wellbeing and productivity

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Mental Wellness Strategies

- Approach Anxiety
 - Like a habit – trigger – behavior – result
 - Evaluate your cycles
 - Is this serving me?
 - The brain is always looking for something more rewarding
 - Take a step back
 - Realize anxiety is made up of physical sensations, thoughts, and emotions
 - Recognize anxiety as energy
 - Need to convert it into concern/action

Spiritual Wellbeing

- The capacity to feel loved, held, and guided by a bigger presence
- Not necessarily religion. For some, very intertwined.
 - Find the moments in a sunset, quiet snowfall.
 - Spiritual moments through service
- Hundreds of studies about protection from depression

Physical, Mental, Spiritual Wellbeing...Sleep!

- Quality
- Quantity

Caregiver/giving Struggle: Fear of being a burden

- We want to protect those we love; hurts us to hurt them
- WE are not the issue, the (cancer, diabetes, etc.) is
- Encourage people to:
 - Acknowledge their fears and worries
 - Take best possible care of yourself
 - Encourage helpers to take caregiving breaks (invite friends to relieve them)
- REMEMBER: giving care and receiving care tend to balance over a lifetime
 - What a gift it can be to lend that support!

For Caregiving Volunteers: Roles bring reward and frustration

- Desire to help more/control more
- Frustrated by the amount that needs to be done
- Know that the benefit you give extends far beyond the actual task
 - Family respite, work schedules, financial savings
 - Social interaction and cognitive stimulation of care receiver

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Sage Advice:

- Ask for and accept help
 - The kind you need, not another frozen casserole
- Ask: does the task HAVE to be done by YOU?
 - Really?
 - Make a list of “top 3 things” for the day (or 2, or 1)
- Respite – run errands or sit quietly without worry
- Whatever happens, you’ll be OK

Caregiver wellness doesn’t mean caring for yourself first, just caring for yourself, also.

Happily, caregiver resources are becoming increasingly available. Remember your self-expertise and select your information with care. What is it that you need?

Examples:

- “Already Toast: Caregiving and Burnout in America” by Kate Washington
- “The Awakened Brain: The New Science of Spirituality and Our Quest for an Inspired Life” by Lisa Miller, Ph.D.
- Caregiver Facebook groups – for immediate feedback/sense of community
- National Institute on Aging – Caregiver Resources
<https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/caregiving>
- National Alliance for Caregiving www.caregiving.org
- National Alliance on Mental Illness www.nami.org

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