

Fill Your Cup First: Self-care for everyday caregivers

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Self Care is Very Important in Allowing You to Care for a Loved One

- Airplane **Instructions-secure your own oxygen mask first** and **then** that of your child passenger
- **This may seem selfish but it is not**-you cannot care for others and ignore your own feelings, needs, and well-being- they go hand in hand
- Feeling guilty about taking time for yourself is not helpful- it undermines self-care (guilt leads to self-neglect)
- If caregiving were a breeze, self care would not be necessary
- Caregiving is both emotionally and physically demanding

Self Care

- Your ideas and expectations about what caregiving is and what it will be in the future influence self-care.
- Caregiving reflects two sides of the same coin.
- Acknowledge that caregiving can be stressful and challenging (cancer, dementia, stroke, GC care).
- It can involve strong feelings- sadness/grief, anger, resentment, anxiety/depression.
- Yet, caregiving can be an **opportunity to grow** - deepen relationships, reinforce love and commitment, lead to new opportunities, skills, insights, and attitudes

Self Care

- YOU define what caregiving is for you. What others think or expect per se is irrelevant.
- Yet, be open to feedback about you-your feelings, skills.
- Self care is **proactive**- YOU develop a self care plan that works for you. This plan will lead to satisfaction that you have done a good job in caregiving.
- A self plan structures caregiving and enhances self confidence.
- A self care plan allows you to assess your strengths and weaknesses and prepares you for the challenges of caregiving.

Developing a Self-Care Plan

- **Be prepared-**

- 1) educate yourself-what will you be facing?
- 2) evaluate the quality of your relationship to the person you will be caring for
- 3) what skills and resources will you need?
- 4) what services and people will you be able to rely upon?
- 5) What feelings do you have about providing care? Fear, anxiety, anger, sadness/grief, resentment, self-confidence, calmness?

Self Care

- 6) Who can you talk to about these feelings?
 - Friend, family member, service provider, professional counselor, chaplain- join a support group
 - Resist the temptation to label your feelings as good or bad, or as a barometer of how adequate you are as a caregiver
 - Do not put off sharing, especially if your feelings are getting in the way of your well-being, ability to provide care, relationships with the person your are caring for or with family, your career, friendships
 - Focus on those feelings (e.g., anger, guilt) that are undermining self care **as well as** positive feelings

Self Care Plan

- Relationship to the person you are caring for?
 - Emotionally close?
 - Tension-filled?
 - Potential for mutual affection and love?
 - Open communication and sharing?
 - Ability to compromise?
 - Can each of you look at things from the other's point of view?
 - Willing to leave the past in the past?
- Take the time to **nurture** this relationship-**quality time**
- Nature of care you must provide? New skills needed?
New knowledge? Duration of care? Predictable or not?
Specialized services needed? (local guide available?)

Self Care

- Your feelings about providing care influence self care. Do you feel forced into this? Do others in your family willingly volunteer to help? Do you feel “dumped on” or abandoned?
- Are there others you can rely upon for help and advice? Who are they? Moments notice?
- Your health-adequate diet, exercise, sleep?
- Is caregiving a job? A chore? Something you feel obligated to do?
- Is caregiving an expression of your love and concern?

Self Care

- Inevitably caregiving is sometimes stressful. How do you cope with stress? What is your style of coping? Are you an emotional copier? Are you a problem solver? Are you logical, analytical, and mentally prepared?
- **Accurately** appraising the stresses you will/are experiencing is important. Do have adequate resources to deal with stress?
 - Physical, health-related, emotional, interpersonal, financial, spiritual
 - Input from support group members, professional organizations (e.g. AARP, Alzheimer's Association, Parkinson's, FTD websites)

Self Care Plan

- **Be realistic-** you are not perfect. You will make mistakes. You will learn from these mistakes as your situation changes. Guilt or blame accomplishes nothing.
- **Create a daily routine.** “Me time”- a walk, lunch, TV – a respite from stress. **Do not compromise on this.**
- How can you make caregiving a **plus** rather than a minus? What is satisfying and pleasurable? Your successes?
- Create a team- your **convoy of support** (inner/outer layers).
- What are your emotional and physical **limits**? What will you do if you exceed these limits?

Self Care Plan

- Set some caregiving **goals**-personally, vocationally, physically, spiritually.
- Derive a plan to meet your goals and overcome barriers to doing so.
- Tend to your own physical and emotional health
 - Resist the temptation to label some feelings as bad and others as good
 - Have someone you can talk with when you are feeling sad, depressed, frustrated, hopeless
 - Seek out information and input from others-validate your own ideas and expectations
 - Being willing to ask for help-“going it alone” is not necessary or a badge of honor – avoid allowing yourself to become isolated

Self Care Plan

- Keep on top of things
 - Do I need new skills? More help? More information?
 - How can improve my time management?
 - Am I tending to my own health?
 - Have I exceeded my limits? Sometimes not possible.
 - Persons to talk to, Me-time, professional input
 - What are my strengths? Am I taking advantage of them?
 - How is my mood?

Self care plan-Staying atop things

- How do I feel when I wake up in the morning?
- Am I open to feedback from others
 - My health/appearance
 - My behavior
 - My feelings
 - My knowledge
 - My attitudes toward getting help
- I am optimistic about the future? Hopeful?
- Look for the positive-”glass half full” mentality

Self Care Plan

- Self care skills:
 - Adequate sleep, physical exercise, diet
 - Spending **quality time** with loved ones
 - Taking medications as prescribed
 - Prayer meditation, tai chi, yoga, cat naps
 - Getting respite care (formal-paid and informal)
 - Avoid drugs or alcohol to cope
 - Setting aside “me time”- shopping, lunch, a drive, a walk, watching a favorite TV show
 - Touching base **daily** with friends and family
 - Rewarding yourself when things go right
 - Thinking positively about you-keeping the “old you”
 - Remaining hopeful, yet realistic about the future

Self Care Plan

Self Care Skills:

- Use facetime, zoom, facebook or other social media to connect
- Purposefully schedule relaxation or exercise
- Monitor your mood, level of fatigue, and frustration daily
- Before going to bed, evaluate your day- how did it go?
 - What did you do well?
 - Are there areas in which you could improve? New skills you needed? How can you acquire them? Experts available?
 - How did you feel when things went well? Not well?
 - What did you do to enhance or deepen your relationship with the loved one you are caring for?
 - Were you open to feedback and suggestions?
 - Did you need help? Did you ask for help when you needed it?

Caregiving and Self Care

- Caregiving is an act of love
- Caregiving is a journey
- Caregiving has its ups and downs
- Feeling frustrated is normal- giving up or lashing out is not
- Look for the rewards in caregiving
- Caregiving is easier if you share your feelings with others
- Caring for you enables you to care for someone else
- Put your own oxygen mask on first!