

 Heart in Hand

Coping Strategies

Your companion in navigating the complexities of caregiving



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Welcome to Heart in Hand's guidebook on Coping Strategies for informal caregivers. This guidebook is designed to support informal caregivers by **offering coping strategies and insights** to navigate the complexities of caregiving. The pressure that all informal caregivers face is acknowledged, and we want to emphasize the importance of self-care and balance. This guide aims to support you in maintaining your own well-being while continuing to provide care for your loved one.

Caring for someone else does not mean neglecting yourself. By learning to recognize stress, establish healthy routines, and access support networks, you can foster both your own health and the quality of care you provide.

Understanding the Emotional Challenges of Caregiving

Caregiving can have many rewards. For most caregivers, caring for a loved one can be rewarding, and for some, it can bring their relationship with the care recipient closer.

But the demands of caregiving can be very stressful and overwhelming at times. This can cause emotional and physical stress. It can occur when you don't get the help you need personally, as you devote all of your time and energy to helping someone else. One can feel anger, frustration, weariness, or sadness. And it's common to feel alone and neglected.

What causes caregiver burnout?

- **Unrealistic expectations:** You may expect to see a positive change in the person you're caring for. However, that may not be the case for people living with certain diseases, like Alzheimer's.
- **Lack of control:** Having limited time, resources and skills to properly care for your loved one may cause frustration. You may feel like you're not doing enough.
- **Unreasonable demands:** You may feel obligated to take on tasks that you may not necessarily need to.
- **Lack of self-awareness:** You may not recognize when you're at a breaking point until it starts to affect your own health and well-being.
- **Too many responsibilities:** Sometimes, caregiving can feel like you're juggling too many obligations at once. Many caregivers experience stress because they see their role as their sole responsibility, even if it's too much for one person to realistically handle. Others, possibly within your or the person within your care's family, may place more unwanted stress on you as the primary caregiver.

What are the signs of caregiver burnout?

The signs of caregiver burnout can feel similar to depression. These signs can include the following:

- Emotional and physical exhaustion.
- Withdrawal from friends, family, and other loved ones.
- Loss of interest in activities previously enjoyed.
- Feeling hopeless and helpless.
- Changes in appetite and/or weight.
- Changes in sleep patterns.
- Unable to concentrate.
- Irritability, frustration, or anger toward others.



Proactive Strategies for Informal Caregivers

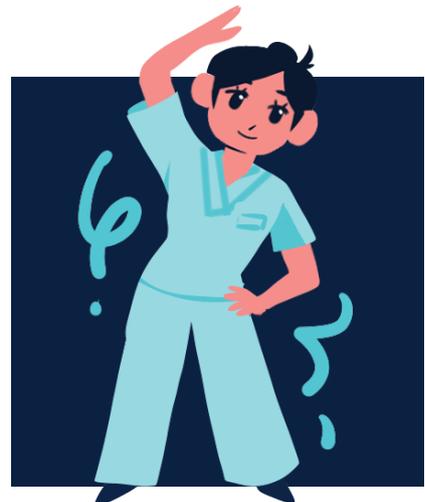
The emotional and physical demands of caregiving can strain even the most resilient person. Make use of most of your resources and tools that can help you. If you don't take care of yourself, you won't be able to care for anyone else. When you're able to show up as your best self, the loved one you're caring for will also benefit.

Self-Care Coping Mechanisms



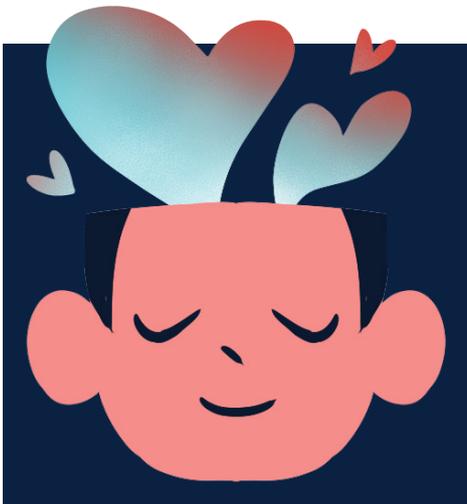
Practice Mindfulness: Being present in the moment can help you reduce anxiety and better cope with stress. Mindfulness can be as simple as focusing on your breathing. When you feel overwhelmed, stop what you're doing, close your eyes, and take slow, deep breaths. Aside from breathing techniques to help ease the mind, it's important for you to be mindful of your physical well-being as well. Simple physical activities like going out for a walk or some gentle stretching can help make you feel better physically and mentally.

Prioritize Having Micro-breaks: Caregiving can often be exhausting with little to no breaks in between, so making big lifestyle changes doesn't seem doable. But there are short activities that don't demand big-time commitment. You could consider doing Tai Chi, a gentle and low-impact exercise that can be done in 10 minutes with no equipment needed. You could even practice some simple chair exercises like shoulder rolls and seated marching.



Cultivate Emotional Intelligence:

Understanding and managing your emotions is a critical skill for family caregivers. Emotional intelligence allows you to recognize your feelings and understand what triggers them, helping you to respond more effectively to stress.



Practice Positive Affirmations: Helping your mind see difficult situations from a different angle by changing negative thoughts with positive ones. Each day, remind yourself of your strengths, your love for the person you care for, and your positive impact on their life.

Seek Professional Help When Needed:

There's no shame in asking for help. Therapists, counselors, or a psychologist can provide emotional support and teach additional strategies to improve your emotional well-being.



Proactive Strategies for Informal Caregivers

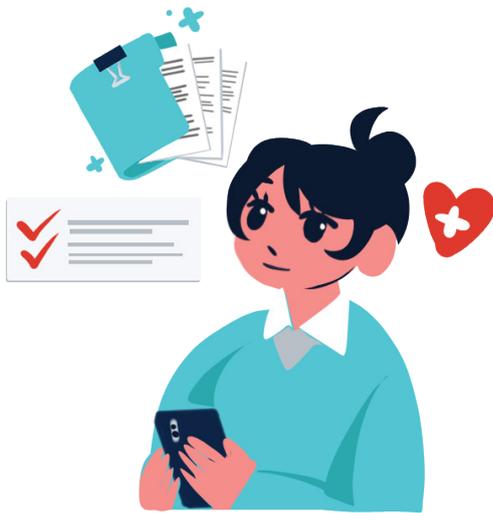
Social Support Strategies



Establish a Support System: Communicate your situation to family members and friends who can provide emotional support or help share caregiving responsibilities. You'd be surprised how many people are willing to help when they understand your needs.

Join a Caregiver Support Group: Connecting with people in a similar situation can provide immense relief. These groups offer a safe space to share your feelings, learn new coping strategies, and find comfort in shared experiences.





Engage with Community Resources: There are available community resources such as TESDA, that have programs for caregivers. These programs provide workshops, training, and seminars that can help fully equip caregivers. Taking advantage of these resources can make a significant difference in managing caregiver stress.

Leverage Technology: Technology can also play a role in helping you stay connected and find support. Many online platforms provide information, support groups, and other resources to help family caregivers.



Proactive Strategies for Informal Caregivers

Taking Respite Care

Respite care provides temporary relief for an informal caregiver by offering short-term care to the person they are looking after. It can be extremely beneficial for a primary caregiver. It can help you take a break, recharge, and find a balance between your responsibility as a caregiver and your personal life.

Why is respite care important?

- **Caregiver well-being:** It prevents caregiver burnout.
- **Improved care quality:** A break allows caregivers to return to their roles feeling refreshed and better equipped to provide care.
- **Social and personal time:** Caregivers can use this time for personal appointments, errands, hobbies, or simply to rest.
- If ever you decide to take a short break from caregiving, there are agencies like the DSWD that provide respite care for caregivers.



Frequently Asked Questions

1. How can caregivers find time for self-care amidst responsibilities?

Caregivers can prioritize self-care by scheduling short breaks, delegating tasks, and asking for help from family or friends. Even small acts of self-care, like a 10-minute walk, can make a difference.

2. What self-care activities are most beneficial for caregivers?

Activities like exercise, mindfulness, journaling, connecting with friends, or pursuing hobbies are highly beneficial. Choose activities that recharge you mentally, emotionally, and physically.

3. How can caregivers cope with feelings of guilt when taking time for themselves

Remember that self-care enables you to be a better caregiver. Reframe self-care as a necessary part of caregiving, not a selfish act. Discuss these feelings with a psychologist if needed.



4. What role does professional support play in caregiver self-care?

Professional support, like therapy or counseling, provides tools to manage stress, address emotions, and develop healthier coping strategies. It's a valuable outlet for overwhelmed caregivers.

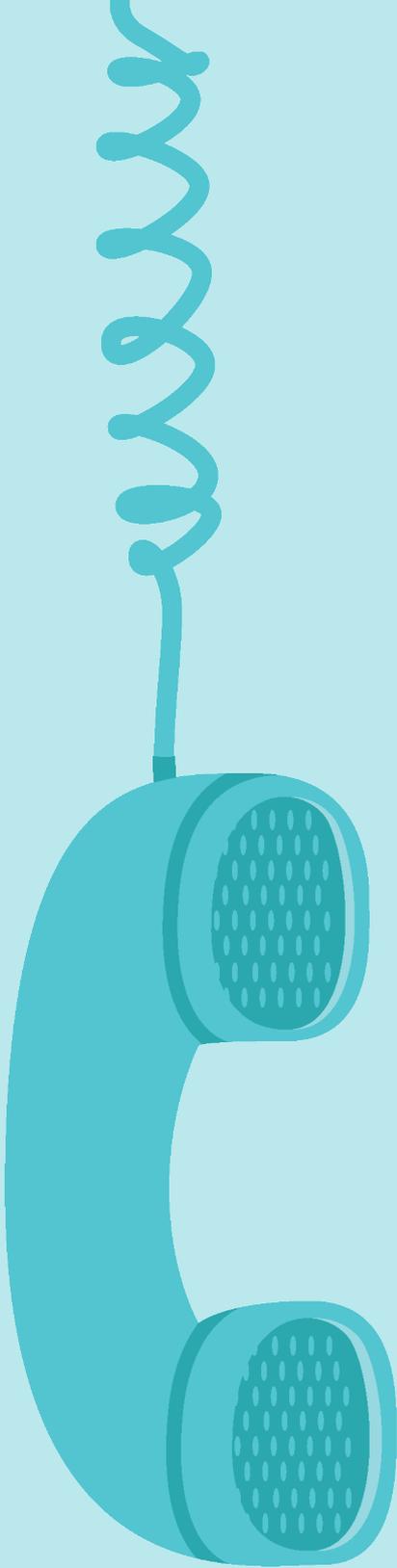
5. How can families support caregivers in practicing self-care?

Family members can share responsibilities, express appreciation, and encourage the caregiver to take breaks. Open communication about needs and limits is crucial.

6. When should a caregiver seek professional help for their own well-being?

Caregivers should seek help if they feel consistently overwhelmed, anxious, or depressed. A psychologist can provide support and strategies to enhance their emotional and mental health.





- Philippine National Emergency Hotline: **911**
- DOH Health Emergency Management Bureau: **(02) 8711-1001 to 02 / (02) 8740-5030**
- Philippine Red Cross Emergency Hotline: **143 or (02) 527-0000**

Support and Connection

National Center for Mental Health (NCMH) Crisis Hotline:

- For individuals experiencing emotional distress or a mental health crisis
- 1553 or 0917-899-8727

Philippine Mental Health Association, Inc. (PMHA):

- Provides mental health services like consultation, counseling, and therapy
- <https://www.pmha.org.ph/>

WiSUPPORT DSWD:

- Provides online and wireless mental health services to individuals and families affected. Their programs offer consultation, learning activities, and referrals to partner organizations.
- <https://ekwentomo.dswd.gov.ph/>

In Touch Community Services

- Provides mental health services performed by certified specialists with the expertise to effectively support emotional and psychological challenges.
- <https://in-touch.org/>
- For general inquiries

(+63 2) 8893 1893 or (+63) 917 863 1136 or (+63) 998 841 0053
- For crisis line.

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