

# The SOLUTION source

Thunder Bay Counselling Centre Newsletter  
By Colleen Ginter, Clinical Counsellor on behalf of Thunder Bay Counselling Centre

For You & Your Family

Winter 2016



## Caregivers and Self-Compassion

Our Winter 2016 newsletter will focus on those individuals who are caregivers and the concept of self-compassion.

You wake up exhausted from yesterday's responsibilities and you groan as you think what today will bring. You wonder, "how am I ever going to do this? How am I going to get through this day?" You feel as if you don't have one more ounce of yourself. You feel guilty for feeling this way, ungrateful to a beloved parent who gave so much to you. You admonish yourself for feeling so selfish and inadequate. People probably have described you as being giving, compassionate and nurturing. Who are you? You are a caregiver.



There are only four kinds of people in this world: those who have been caregivers; those who currently are caregivers; those who will be caregivers and those who will need caregivers."

Rosalynn Carter  
Former First Lady

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## What is a Caregiver?

Who are we referring to when we say caregivers? Caregivers can come in many guises and we will include some types but perhaps a definition might be more helpful as the list of types of caregivers is a long one!!!

### TYPES OF CAREGIVERS

#### Informal

A caregiver is an individual who provides ongoing care and assistance, without pay, for family members and friends in need of support due to physical, cognitive, or mental health conditions. The term is sometimes qualified with family caregiver, informal caregiver, or unpaid caregiver. (Canadian Hospice Care Association of Canada)

#### Formal

Formal caregivers include a wide variety of health care professionals such as Personal Support Workers (PSWs), nurses, physicians, social workers, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, etc.

## Take Care of Yourself Too!

Remembering to pause and take care of ourselves can be one of the biggest challenges we face when we're consumed with looking after someone else's needs. Add to this caring for young children or a demanding job (or both) and you may be too exhausted to even think of the possibility of a break! Consider how you can work in small doses of self-care to relieve stress, instead of skipping them altogether.

Some inspiration, if you have:

### 🕒 5 minutes

- Do some stretching
- Meditate in a quiet room
- Practice deep breathing
- Turn on some music and dance

### 🕒 10 minutes

- Make a cup of tea
- Take a power nap
- Write in a journal or a short poem
- Connect socially with other caregivers online (Twitter, Facebook, email)

### 🕒 15 - 30 minutes

- Walk around the block
- Call a friend
- Go for a run or bike ride
- Read or watch something funny
- Knit
- Browse the web or a favourite app

### 🕒 60 minutes

- Create something - paint, make a collage, sketch, build something
- Take a bath
- Go to a park
- Meet a friend for coffee or shopping
- Go to the driving range
- Watch a favourite show
- Get a massage

(From St. Elizabeth Health Care - Creative Ways to Take Caregiver Breaks)



## SENIOR LIVING MAGAZINE ALSO PROVIDES THESE SUGGESTIONS:

### ✓ Accept your own limits.

As a caregiver, you don't have to do it all, and you shouldn't try. Accept that there are limits to what you can do as a caregiver. Admit when you feel overwhelmed, and ask for help.

### ✓ Create a caregiver support team.

Before you can ask for help, you need to know who you can ask. Plan ahead for times when you'll need help by making a list of people who are willing to help you with caregiver support.

### ✓ Get organized.

Being a caregiver can be a full-time job, even if you already have a full-time job. Make a realistic schedule with your family and friends to make sure you get the caregiver support you need; assign chores, and make sure everyone knows what to do and when to do it. This will help everyone stay organized, and it will help you, as primary caregiver, to manage the extra demands on your time.

### ✓ Schedule time for yourself.

Don't forget to schedule time for activities you enjoy. There are more important things than doing the laundry, and caregiver support is one of them.

Remember, this is about staying healthy in mind and body, so you need to make time to have fun now and then.

### ✓ Make your own health your first priority.

This may sound selfish, but it's not. Being a caregiver is a big job, and the only way you can provide the caregiving your loved one needs is to make sure you stay healthy. The kind of stress you're trying to manage every day can easily lead to depression; staying fit and healthy can help you cope, reduce stress, and make it easier to get through tough days when they come. Following these tips for caregiver support will help you stay on the right track:

- Eat a balanced diet. This is vital to good long-term health, and it shouldn't be hard to manage. Chances are the person you're caring for has been ordered to eat well, and you're probably preparing and/or sharing many of those meals.
- Get plenty of rest. Try to get the requisite eight hours every night. If you're short on sleep because your caregiver duties require you to be up and down during the night, take naps the following day when your loved one is sleeping.
- Exercise regularly. Aim for 30-60 minutes of exercise four to six times a week; even a walk around the block will help clear your mind and keep you more fit. Regular exercise will give you more energy, reduce your stress, and elevate your mood.
- Relax. Do relaxation exercises--such as deep breathing or meditating--to reduce caregiver stress. If possible, set aside a few minutes at the beginning and end of your day to practice these techniques.
- Consciously relaxing in this way will help you enter the day more calmly, and make it easier for you to sleep at night. You can also do deep breathing now and then throughout the day to help keep your stress under control.
- Take a break. At least once or twice each week, stop being a caregiver for awhile and take some time for yourself. If you do, you'll be happier and better able to care for your loved one.
- See your doctor. Get regular medical check-ups; you need them more than ever now, because you're managing a lot of extra stress and emotional turmoil.

Being a caregiver for someone you love is one of the toughest jobs imaginable. It's frustrating and terrifying, exhausting and overwhelming, but it can be one of the most rewarding things you'll ever do — a supreme act of love.

## Caregiver Burnout

(WebMD)

Caregiver burnout is a state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion that may be accompanied by a change in attitude -- from positive and caring to negative and unconcerned. Burnout can occur when caregivers don't get the help they need, or if they try to do more than they are able -- either physically or financially. Caregivers who are "burned out" may experience fatigue, stress, anxiety, and depression. Many caregivers also feel guilty if they spend time on themselves rather than on their ill or elderly loved ones.

### WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF CAREGIVER BURNOUT?

The symptoms of caregiver burnout are similar to the symptoms of stress and depression. They include:

- Withdrawal from friends and family
- Loss of interest in activities previously enjoyed
- Feeling blue, irritable, hopeless, and helpless
- Changes in appetite, weight, or both
- Changes in sleep patterns
- Getting sick more often
- Feelings of wanting to hurt yourself or the person for whom you are caring
- Emotional and physical exhaustion
- Excessive use of alcohol and/or sleep medications
- Irritability



## WHAT CAUSES CAREGIVER BURNOUT?

Caregivers often are so busy caring for others that they tend to neglect their own emotional, physical, and spiritual health. The demands on a caregiver's body, mind, and emotions can easily seem overwhelming, leading to fatigue and hopelessness -- and, ultimately, burnout. Other factors that can lead to caregiver burnout include:

### Role confusion

It can be difficult for a person to separate her role as caregiver from her role as spouse, lover, child, friend, etc.

### Unrealistic expectations

Many caregivers expect their involvement to have a positive effect on the health and happiness of the patient. This may be unrealistic for patients suffering from a progressive disease.

### Lack of control

Many caregivers become frustrated by a lack of money, resources, and skills to effectively plan, manage, and organize their loved one's care.

### Unreasonable demands

Some caregivers place unreasonable burdens upon themselves, in part because they see providing care as their exclusive responsibility.

### Other factors

Many caregivers cannot recognize when they are suffering burnout and eventually get to the point where they cannot function effectively. They may even become sick themselves.

## HOW CAN WE HEAL FROM CAREGIVER BURNOUT?

- Find someone you trust to talk to about your feelings and frustrations.
- Set realistic goals, accept that you may need help with caregiving, and turn to others for help with some tasks.
- Be realistic
- Don't forget about yourself because you're too busy caring for someone else.
- Talk to a professional.
- Take advantage of respite care services. Respite care provides a temporary break for caregivers. This can range from a few hours of in-home care to a short stay in a nursing home or assisted living facility.
- Know your limits and do a reality check of your personal situation.
- Educate yourself. The more you know about the illness, the more effective you will be in caring for the person with the illness.
- Develop new tools for coping. Remember to lighten up and accentuate the positive. Use humor to help deal with everyday stresses.
- Stay healthy by eating right and getting plenty of exercise and sleep.
- Accept your feelings. Having negative feelings about your responsibilities or the person for whom you are caring is normal. It does not mean you are a bad person or a bad caregiver.

One of the best ways for the caregiver to care for themselves is with self-compassion.

## WHAT IS SELF-COMPASSION?

Self-compassion is extending compassion to one's self in instances of perceived inadequacy, failure or general suffering. Dr. Kristen Neff has defined self-compassion as being composed of three main components – self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness.



The Alzheimer Society of Sault Ste. Marie & Algoma District provides support and education to caregivers and individuals diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease or related dementias. We also provide in-home recreation therapy services, public education and have a lending library of up-to-date books and videos.

**Caregiver Support Groups**  
- Elliot Lake  
Every 3rd Tuesday of each month  
1:30pm - 3:00 pm

**Living Well with Memory Loss**  
Support Group  
Every 4th Wednesday of each month  
1:30pm - 3:00pm

**Call us for more information!**  
705-848-8145

[counsellingeastalgoma.ca](http://counsellingeastalgoma.ca)