TOOLS TO MANAGE WORK
WHILE CARING AND GRIEVING

A WORKBOOK FOR YOUR WORKPLACE WELLNESS

BY DENISE M. BROWN

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Join us at CaringOurWay.com, which offers:

- Events that empower and inspire you.
- Free courses to support you during and after your caregiving experience.
- Training to help you lead through your caregiving experience at home and in the workplace.

Join Your Caregiving Department on Caring Our Way to:

- Complete assessments to help you better understand your personal caregiving experience.
- Receive answers to your caregiving questions from Certified Caregiving Consultants. CCCs combine their personal caregiving with our specialized training to serve family caregivers and former family caregivers.
- Take surveys to help us better understand your needs.

Denise is the author of several books which help you manage your caregiving and after-caregiving experiences, including:

- The Caregiving Years, Navigating the Six Caregiving Stages;
- Take Comfort (four-book series);
- Healing Words, Soothing Strategies for Your Caregiving Fatigues;
- After Caregiving Ends, A Guide to Beginning Again.

To review Denise's books, visit amazon.com/shop/caregiving/.

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INTRODUCTION

Your guide features tools to help you prepare
for whatever the day will bring.

You run a software update at 3 a.m. in the Emergency Room while your father, who just fell at home, has a CT scan.

Your colleagues shows up to work on Tuesday after learning on Monday that his spouse's cancer has spread to a terminal state. His spouse agreed to receive hospice services.

Your manager requests an all-hands-on-deck meeting to announce he needs to take a leave of absence to organize care for his sibling who has long COVID.

Our work life now includes our life's work – caring for a family member with a chronic illness or disease or injury. How do we make room for both experiences in the workplace? How do we take time during our work day to manage our stress and worries? How do we console our colleagues who grieve?

A Workbook for Your Workplace Wellness shares tools to help you manage your experiences as an employee, a co-worker and a family caregiver.

Your Worksheets section includes tools to use daily and weekly. If you'd like support integrating these tools into your day, consider joining our monthly two-hour workshop, Building Workplace Resilience. During our workshop, you'll also learn about our training to become a Workplace Wellness Guide to bring these tools to your workplace. Visit CaringOurWay.com to learn more about and enroll in the Building Workplace Resilience workshop.

Your own wellness can feel so elusive as you work so hard to create wellness for others. I hope this workbook allows you to receive the wellness you deserve.

Key

We use the term "family caregiver" to describe an individual, like you, who cares for a family member or friend.

We use the term "caree" to refer to the individual receiving your care.

(Image by Margo Lipa from Pixabay.)

SECTION 1: A FAMILY MEMBER'S DIAGNOSIS

A family member's diagnosis changes your today and your view of your tomorrow.

According to CDC's National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, 6 in 10 adults in the U.S. have a chronic illness. Four in 10 adults in the U.S. have two or more chronic illnesses.

Throughout our work like, our family members will receive a diagnosis. The diagnosis impacts everyone because the diagnosis changes life for everyone.

In this section, we offer suggestions to help you manage after a family member receives a diagnosis.

Ugh! A Diagnosis. Now What?

In 2004, my dad received his first diagnosis of bladder cancer. We knew something was wrong prior to the diagnosis. He and my mom returned home early from a vacation because of blood in my dad's urine. My dad loves to travel and loves to vacation. But, he was desperate to get home. That's when we knew he knew something was really wrong.

My dad had tests, followed up by an appointment to learn the results of the test. I went with my folks to the appointment to hear the news. I took notes and asked questions. I just let my parents hear the news. When we arrived home, my mom made the calls to my siblings. I'll always remember how she pulled up the stool to the phone in the kitchen, pulled out the phone book, sat down and dialed. I offered to make the calls, but she said she was okay.

It's not a holiday, Diagnosis Day, but it's a day that's so momentous for all the wrong reasons that it becomes etched in our memories. The world looks the same but a diagnosis changes how the world feels. It all feels so strange.

What do you after Diagnosis Day? Some ideas to help you cope:

1. Believe the diagnosis gives you time. You have time to research, plan, communicate. You have time to get a second opinion; you have time to research the disease, its progression and treatment options. You have time to talk with your caree, other family members and friends. You have time to make the most of the time you have.

2. Know denial about the diagnosis will steal your time. You may be tempted to disbelieve a diagnosis, to hide it. Denial, not the diagnosis, is the true enemy. In denial, you deny yourself the chance to learn, prepare, plan and understand. The progression of a disease will arrive on time; denial will make you late for its arrival. Playing catch-up after its arrival will waste precious time. And, before you know it, there won't be enough time. Don't let denial take your time.

3. Consider how well you and your caree respect and like your caree's health care professionals.
The right physician and care team can make a huge difference. If you feel a disconnect during the discussion about the diagnosis, consider getting another opinion and finding another physician.

4. Talk about the diagnosis with your caree (if appropriate). Then, let your caree talk about the diagnosis with his or her own support system. Do the same for yourself; call a friend or a family member to talk about how it feels. Talking about it with someone will help keep you from denial.

5. When you talk about the diagnosis with your caree, talk about your priorities. What's a priority for your caree? The most aggressive treatment? The best quality of life? Time with family? Time traveling? How do these priorities align with yours? How can you make the priorities a reality?

6. Let the news sink in. You've had a shock, no matter how expected the diagnosis. The news is shocking. You will feel different. Allow yourself to get used to your new skin, so to speak.

7. Start a journal to document how you feel and what this feels like. Even if you think you won't like journaling, you will like going to a place (your journal) where you get to let it all out. When it comes out, it somehow sorts itself out.

8. Contact organizations, like disease-specific agencies, that can provide information. Gather information and look for online communities that can provide help and support.

9. Take deep breaths. Sounds so simple but when news takes the wind out of you, breathing seems to be the last thing we remember to do. Take deep breaths.

10. Get out of the house. Take a walk, pick up take-out for dinner, stop at a friend's, go to the library. A change of scenery and the motion it takes to get there will help.
Consider joining our free monthly planning session, **A Plan for You After a Family Member's Diagnosis,** on the first Tuesday at 1 p.m. ET to talk it out, figure it out and plan it out. It can feel lonely after a diagnosis; in our company, you'll feel support. Visit CaringOurWay.com to register to join us.

With a diagnosis, life changes for you, your family member and your family. And, so does your future. In the future, because of the diagnosis, you may find yourself in the role of family caregiver, helping your family member manage both a health condition and the day. How do you prepare for the role of family caregiver?

As you think about a future of caregiving, this is your time to prepare. You should research options, gather information, and provide the opportunity for your caree to share his or her feelings and values. This is also your time to concentrate on taking care of yourself by keeping up with family and friends, enjoying your hobbies and interests, and pursuing your career goals.

Resources

- Learn more about where you are in your caregiving experience by taking our assessment, Six Caregiving Stages: Where Are You?.

Managing the Conversations

For eleven years, my dad was in and out of bladder cancer. He received treatment, was given a clean report, then the cancer came back.

Each time we returned home after the doctor gave the bad news that it's back, I asked my dad, “Do you want me to send an email to everyone?”

He always answered, “That would be great.”

He lived it so didn’t really want to talk about it.

A family member's diagnosis can leave you tongue-tied, unable to find the words to share what's going on and to answer questions from concerned family members.

When I sent an email to my siblings and nieces, I relayed the facts:

> Dad had a biopsy a few weeks ago; we went today to learn the results.
>
> Unfortunately, the cancer is back. He has to have a CAT scan in the new few weeks to make sure the cancer is just in his bladder. Assuming it is, he then starts treatments, once a week for six weeks.
>
> The doctor also recommends a maintenance program after the initial six-week treatment. After he completes the six-week treatment, he'd have another biopsy to ensure the cancer is gone. Then, he'd start a maintenance program; every three months, he'd have BCG treatments for two weeks.
>
> He is upset about this news but taking it the best he can. He and Mom have a trip planned in May which is the priority. So, we'll work the treatment plan around the trip.

When you share news in person, you may worry about the emotions of the news; you may dread talking about it because you just don't want to cry. It's okay to cry because this news truly has earned your tears. Know you control how much you share, which may sound like this:

“We've had a rough few weeks. Frank was just diagnosed with (insert the diagnosis). We're doing our best to absorb the news and plan our next steps. I have good days and bad days. You caught me on a particularly emotional day.”

When you share the news, others may respond with kindness, which is great. Some may respond with advice, which can be helpful or absolutely irritating, depending on how it's delivered. If you hear too much advice, you can say something like, “I appreciate that. We have a great team helping us so we're going to stick with their recommendations and suggestions.”

You also may notice that some friends disappear after hearing your news. Your news will scare you as well as others in your life. That fear will cause some to run (it's the fight or flight response). When others run, know it's not about you but about their fear.

Prepare Rather Than Panic

On a regular basis several years ago, I connected with Anna Stookey, a therapist based in Beverly Hills, for a monthly podcast.

During one of our shows, we focused on the big fear: What will happen next? What will the future be like? The fear also may sound like this: Something awful will happen next, I just know it.

We spoke about preparing for the future versus panicking about the future. Preparing for the future means being aware of what you control. You can control what you do this minute, what you do now to manage the here and now. You can prepare by understanding your caree's disease process, budgeting and saving, and considering your options as the disease process progresses.

Panicking means trying to control what can't be controlled. When you fly into your future and guess what horrible event you'll have to face, you're managing your future. It sounds possible to manage your future, but you can't, simply because you can't know with certainty what your future will bring. It's much more productive to manage the moment, to focus on the details on your life today. The details of your life tomorrow may change.

We also spoke about the fear of our mortality, that a diagnosis puts a face on your caree's mortality. Meaning, we understand we all will die, but the diagnosis brings it home. The diagnosis now makes the mortality a reality because you have a name for it (the disease) and a time frame (the prognosis). That can be frightening.

The cure for the fear of mortality is to make the most of the moments. Live for today. Tomorrow, you'll be so glad you did.

Resources

- To connect with Anna, visit her website: www.bodymindguide.com

10 Healing Tips When Life Seems to Break

We can find our way to healing.

A family member's diagnosis breaks our trust, our beliefs, our dreams. We can heal.

Life once seemed manageable. Sure, you had bumps and some setbacks but you also had resources to recover.

Until a phone call or a doctor's appointment changes everything. Then, nothing feels manageable and life no longer feels like the one you want.

When a family member receives a life-altering diagnosis or suffers a life-changing injury, we may find ourselves wanting to give back this life which we do not recognize. We can no longer trust in life's goodness. We can no longer believe that life is fair. We can no longer dream of a future that looks fun and festive and fabulous.

Our life seems to break.

Every break needs a chance to heal. How do we heal our life so we can continue?

These suggestions can help you find what can heal your life:

1. Create. Write, draw, doodle, knit, carve, photograph, grow. Embrace a creative exercise that feels natural and doable to you. Your creativity isn't necessarily about the outcome (like writing a book that lands on *The New York Times* best-sellers list) but about tapping into your God-given gift. Creativity also can bring you into a flow when you focus fully on the task at hand, which means you receive a break from worries, stress and overwhelm. Kathy Murri, one of our Certified Caregiving Consultants, shared more about flow during her presentation at The Caring Conference, Our Resilient Spirit in April 2021.

2. Receive nature. Sit in your backyard, walk through a nature preserve, stroll by a river or lake. Nature reminds us that it continues through its four seasons. We can find comfort in knowing our seasons are temporary, too, which is why we can continue. This season in our life is hard. Another season will come that will give our life new colors.

3. Acknowledge your grief. Because you've suffered a huge loss, you are in the process of grieving. Grieve. Feel the sadness of the losses you experience today and the sadness for the loss of a future you had expected. You'll also feel grief for others in your life, including your caree and your family. Your grief can express itself through tears, anger, indecision. When you question the intensity of your emotions, know your grief needs an outlet. Release the grief through writing, grief movement or venting to a supportive person.

4. Redefine time. When caregiving becomes part of your life, you'll have more to do without receiving more time to do it. The day still has 24 hours, the year still compromises 365 days. Because you will add critically-important responsibilities, you'll feel like you don't have time for laundry or home-cooked meals or a clean home. The horrible irony is that you will need to do more at a time when you'll be just exhausted from your grief. Redefine what it means to be on time. You're on time with laundry when you have clean underwear for today. You're on time with meals when you have some healthy meals and some convenient ones. You're on time with cleaning when you ask for help once a month from your family to keep the house clean. You're on time when you're simply doing your best.

5. Protect your time. Some family members and friends will be incredibly supportive and helpful. Some won't. Invest your time in ways that give back to you. Relationships which don't earn your investment right now are just that — the wrong fit right now. You don't have to burn a bridge. You can simply protect your time with a turn toward what comforts you and a turn away from what drains you.

6. Be fair to yourself. You're managing a significant, difficult change. You'll have impatient days when you simply feel unkind. You'll have better days when you feel good. Judge yourself based on the totality of your days rather than just on one bad day. The day after your bad day, give yourself a chance to be better.

7. Begin the process of forgiveness. You'll feel so much resentment toward the disease, your day, the health care system, the friends who seem so insensitive, the family members who tell you about the cures that simply don't apply to your family member's situation. The resentments could grow a bitterness that truly will break you. Feel it and then start the process of forgiveness. The process may take a few minutes or several years. Just starting the process will lessen the chance that resentments will ruin the rest of your life.

8. Know it's not personal. It seems like life's unfairness happened to you and your caree which is why it feels so personal. You're a good person. Why would this happen to you? It's unfair and, yet, it's not personal. You certainly face tough challenges but you aren't being punished. You are loved and will remain loved.

9. Determine your comfort level with change. With so much changing, you may feel overwhelmed by all that needs to change. Keep up with changes the best you can. When it's too much, take a break.

10. Respect another's comfort level with change. You may see the importance of quickly adjusting to the changes because it's how you keep up. Others may process change at a slower speed. Understand their process without slowing down your progress. A fight over how slow they adjust only will add tension to your relationship and your day. Explain your position: "Time is so important to me right now. I want to use time in a way that's good for us. That's why I want to make this change." Then, ask: "What's difficult about this change for you?" Engage in the conversation so that you can reach a compromise that respects both positions.

After a family member's diagnosis, you may be bombarded with messages to "take care of yourself, too." These messages may sound both trite and contrived. You can reply, "I'm focused on my own healing. That's how I'm taking care of myself."

We have a tool, The Daily Healing Plan, in our Grieving Section which can help. The plan features a three-step process that helps you name the pain, the healing strategy and the healing outcome. Three questions prompt you to reflect to find your answers:

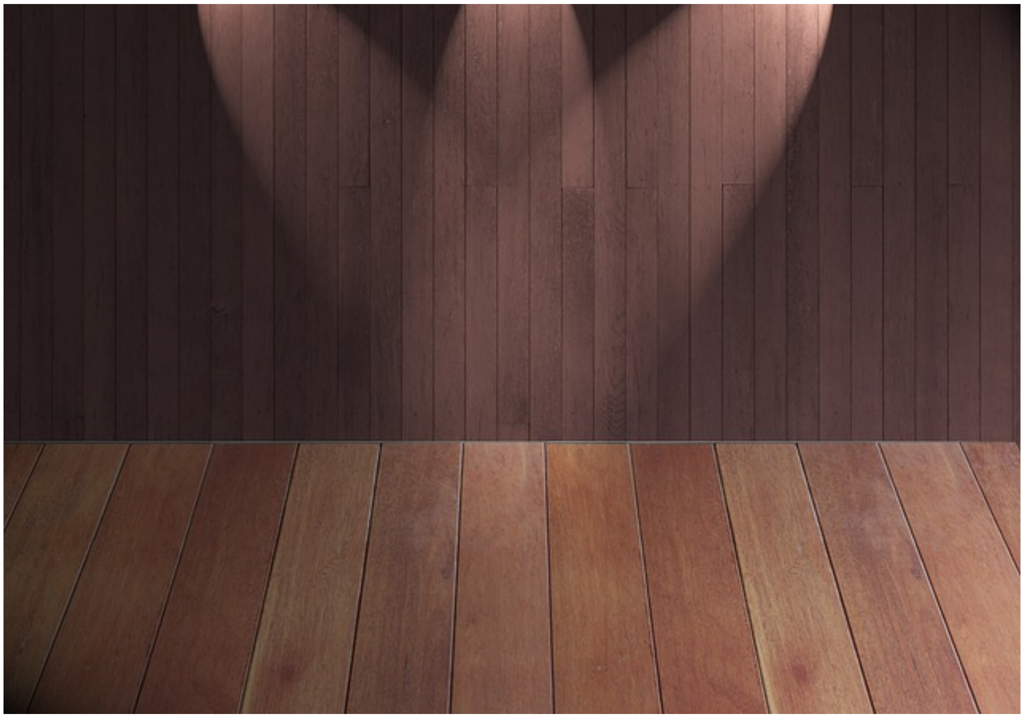
1. What are you healing through?

2. What are you healing with?

3. What are you healing to?

You deserve to feel better by taking time each day to give yourself time to heal.

SECTION 2: MANAGING REVIEWS



When you feel reviewed, you feel on stage, by yourself, with all eyes on you.

Whether you work in a Fortune 500 company, for yourself full-time or at the local retail store part-time, you'll be reviewed. You'll always hope for a positive review. The reality, though, is that you'll have reviews which, well, will leave you wishing you could crawl into a hole.

During a time in your life when you raise kids, dedicate yourself to your career goals, care for family members and grieve those who have died, you will feel a rawness in your emotions. Even as you do what you can to manage your emotions, you carry them with you into the workplace, making the sting of reviews particularly difficult. For instance, your grief may mean the tears stay ready to flow. On good days, you only let the tears flow outside of work. But on a bad day, a day that includes a tough review, the tears just go. The last place you way to cry is in your boss's office during your annual review.

Let's support you so you can manage the reviews.

(Image by Gaby Stein from Pixabay.)

The Setback Exercise

We recently asked working family caregivers: How do you manage your caregiving stress and difficult emotions like frustration and grief while at work?

They said:

“Try to listen to piano music at some point in the workday.”

“I don't know that I manage them. I just muddle through the best I can.”

“I suppress it, but when I can't keep it out of my mind I have to go to the meditation room to collect myself.”

“I use work as a helpful distraction from difficult feelings.”

“Sleep. Research. Obsessive planning.”

“Usually take a few minute in the restroom and cry it out.”

“CBD gummies, lavender scented stuff.”

“I go to the bathroom and cry if necessary.”

We do all that we can to manage our motions. The reality of our workday, though, includes reviews. How do you manage the reviews when your emotions already take so much energy to manage?

For instance, you may not sleep well the night before your caree’s doctor’s appointment scheduled for the next afternoon. On the morning of the appointment, a deal you’ve been working on for months falls through and you have to tell your boss. You now fret about two reviews: The review from your boss about how you managed the sales cycle of the deal that went bust and the bad news, which feels like a bad review, your caree may receive during the doctor’s appointment.

How do you find the stamina to manage the impact of two tough reviews on the same day?

Graciousness is your best strategy because it buys and saves you time. When you thank your boss for her feedback, you buy yourself time to receive her words. You save time by avoiding a defensive retort like, “But this customer is a jerk!.”

When you begin with “Thank you for being honest with us” after hearing difficult news from a doctor, you then buy yourself time to consider the next questions to ask. You save yourself time because you don’t have to chase down the doctor after the appointment to get answers to the questions you wish you had asked.

Two simple words — "Thank you" — give you time to think and to collect yourself. You then have a few seconds to take time to take a breath and respond as appropriately as possible.

Perhaps the toughest reviews we endure come from ourselves. We review ourselves as employees, parents, family caregivers. We decide we must be almost super-human and anything less can be called a failure. Rather than judging ourselves, we can take care of moments when we feel like we failed.

I created an exercise that can help you acknowledge what didn't go well and then take care of it so you can move forward. We all have disappointments because of a loss. We all deserve to give ourselves another moment to create a win.

When we've had a bad review, we often stay stuck in the bad review. Rather than ruminating over the review, we need to get back to the present moment to recover.

Setback Exercise

You've had a setback. How can you get back to the moment?

Consider this statement: The set back hurt my ___________.

Your answer could be:

Feelings.
Pride.
Expectations.
Possibilities.
Heart.
Soul.
Spirit.
Courage

With an answer about your pain, you can now move to healing. Your healing comes when you get back to the present.

Consider: In the moment, I can ________.

Your answer could be:

Communicate.
Exit.
Breathe.
Forgive.

Move.
Ignore.
Clarify.
Pivot.
Heal.
Decide.

When you’ve had a setback, get back to the moment. In the next moment, you will find your way to your win.

Staying Our Best

Words. Options. Wisdom.

We want to give our best to all areas of our life.

When you feel at your best, you have so much more energy to keep going because your best just powers you.

During our day, though, we'll encounter those who may not be at their best. We find ourselves negotiating responsibilities, for instance, with those who may bring out our worst. In addition, we may be struggling through a difficult day that leave us feeling impatience and irritable.

How do we stay our best, when caregiving responsibilities and grieving experiences can bring out the worst?

We can keep in mind:

- It's not personal.
- We can communicate clearly.
- We can advocate effectively.
- We can give ourselves time.
- We can revisit the situation later.

We can be ready with our best. We can be ready to WOW:

Words.
Options.
Wisdom.

With ready **words**, we can manage our emotions in order to better manage our interactions. We can:

- Ask for time.
- Ask for a break.
- Ask for more information.
- Ask for ideas.
- Ask to include another viewpoint.
- Ask for specific help.

We also have a choice about any commitments we make. We can:

- Say Yes.
- Say Maybe.
- Say If, then. This can sound like, “If I have help making dinner, then we can watch a movie after.”
- Say No. When you can’t, know you don’t have to apologize or explain. You can simply say, “I can’t right now.”

Which words work for you?

With a menu of **options**, we give ourselves a chance to control any difficult situations. We can:

- Take a breath.
- Take a break.
- Take time.
- Take an idea into consideration.
- Take the request to another person.

Which options work for you?

With a belief in our **wisdom**, we can observe during our interactions in order to understand the reality of the moment:

- What do you know to be true?
- What do you know could be true?
- What could be true for another?
- How can you facilitate a truthful discussion?

What wisdom works for you?

Here's how WOW can work. You ask your sibling to bring your caree to a doctor's appointment because you can't miss another day of work. Your sibling is your only other option but is also your most difficult option. Before you make the phone, you can prepare your WOW:

Words
"Mary, Mom has a doctor's appointment next Tuesday at 1 p.m. I can't miss any more time at work. Unfortunately, this appointment can't be changed. I'd love for you to take Mom to this appointment. In total, this will take about three hours of your time between travel and appointment time."

Options
After making the request, you can take a deep breath to relax as you listen to Mary's response to your request. Because you decided to breathe into relaxing, you can calmly manage Mary's reluctance and non-committal answers.

Wisdom
In addition, because you know Mary so well, you can tap into your wisdom to you navigate the conversation to negotiate a commitment to help. Your wisdom can sound like:

"I know your help will mean the world to Mom. You are so important to her and she loves spending time with you. Mom will have a list of questions to bring to the doctor's appointment so all you have to do is take notes when the doctor shares her answers. You really take great notes so it's awesome that it's working out that you will be with Mom for this really important appointment."

"I appreciate that this is an inconvenience for you. Mom is so grateful for your help. We feel so thankful that you can step in to help. Mom appreciates what an integral part of her care team you are."

"I'll let Mom know you will pick her up at 12:30 p.m. Thank you again so much for making this happen for Mom."

Your wisdom also will guide you in how to follow up and remind Mary of the appointment.

When you encounter a difficult interaction, how can you WOW them?

(Image by S K from Pixabay.)

SECTION 3: THE GRIND OF DIFFICULT DAYS

The intensity of our responsibilities feel
like a load too heavy to move.

We show up.

We show up at work, at home, in our communities, in our relationships. Showing up, though, means that we can find ourselves in the grind of our day.

In this section, we offer ways to help you show up for yourself.

(Image by gentlegiant27153 from Pixabay.)

Self-Care During Caregiving Is Different

First, we heal our lives. Then, we heal ourselves.

In the summer of 2015, my parents were critically ill at the same time. I was running a small business, delivering workplace presentations on behalf of Employee Assistance Programs, and working part-time jobs. While I did everything in my power to keep my parents alive, I didn't have the energy for my self-care activities to which I had been so committed: My daily 50-minute walks and three-times-per-week Pilates work-out.

The juggle, the struggle, the worry, the stress showed up in a 30-pound weight gain, seemingly overnight. I could wear my jeans in May. I could barely get them over my ankles in October.

A year later, I shared about my challenging summer and my weight gain with a colleague. "Oh," he said, "you weren't taking care of yourself."

Wow, did that comment piss me off.

It also inspired me to really look at self-care during caregiving. Often, our need for peace of mind, the knowledge that we did all we could during a crisis, means we sacrifice sleep. Then, our utter exhaustion lead us to decide we need to rest on the couch rather than take the walk. Then, our craving for energy drives us to a carb-heavy meal.

We do our best to meet our needs during the intensity of caregiving. We're not lazy, or neglectful or ignoring our needs. We're surviving.

Caregiving breaks our life. We no longer call our schedule our own, we no longer see some family members as supportive, we no longer have time for who and what we love, we no longer assume we'll have the help we need when we need it.

We need to heal our broken life. The process of healing needs time, compassion, forgiveness. I truly believe many family caregivers are right now in the process of healing their lives. That priority means the traditional self-care definitions simply may not apply. Before I can enroll in a yoga class or take a walk or enjoy a bubble bath, I need to put the pieces of my life back together. Then, when I feel like some of life fits again, I can think about beginning my day with a seven-minute work-out on my app or ending my day with a walk.

It's why the messages in the media ("family caregivers neglect their health" and "family caregivers ignore their self-care") simply don't ring true to so many of us in the caregiving experience. We're focused on healing our lives. We need support in our healing. We don't need to fixed. We need to be understood.

During that summer of 2015, I took regular breaks at my community pool. In the pool, I floated on my back, simply watching the clouds and receiving the sun. I had no energy for exertion. I had no desire to swim. I floated which kept me from drowning.

When we’re healing, we’re floating. Even though floating didn’t keep my weight off, it kept me from an utter collapse. Because of the floating, I survived. We all should be allowed to float without judgement until we can swim.

Both floating and swimming are forms of self-care. It’s important we embrace our amazing ability to stay afloat when the crushing waves of caregiving break.

We float until we can swim.

5 Tips to Help Create Plans for the Worries

The worries can be prompts for us to prepare.

Every worry needs a plan.

I remind myself of this regularly so that I'm not stuck in worry but engaged in planning which leads to action.

I've used this philosophy over and over during my caregiving experience. Sometimes, my worry prompts me to have a conversation. For instance, last spring, I began worrying about what to do immediately after a parent's death if I'm the only one there when one of them dies.

I told them of my worry and then asked, "Who do you want to come see you after you die?" They told me that they want everyone to stop to say good-bye, even my AWOL sister who broke my mother's heart. I'm grateful to know this because I now have peace about my sister's visit. I then asked the palliative care nurse for instructions, which led me to meet with a staff member at the cremation society to finalize plans.

To help you turns this practice into a habit, I've created five tips to help:

1. Name the worry. "I'm worried (fill in the blank)." Naming the worry turns a paralyzing thought into a courageous statement.

2. Ask the "What if" questions. For instance, if you worry about your caree falling, then you can ask, "What products might be able to help?" I've purchased Helping Handles, which I keep at my parent's apartment. I also purchased skin protectors to protect my dad's very thin skin on his arms. When my dad falls, the skin tears, which become significant wounds, land him in the hospital. I also keep supplies on hand including non-stick bandages. You also can ask your caree, "How can I help so we prevent falls?" You also could discuss what kind of injury merits a trip to the emergency room. My mom will refuse a trip to the Emergency Room, preferring to stay at home. My mom, though, is much easier to get up after a fall than my dad.

3. Communicate with others involved and impacted by any scenario. My niece, who often helps with my parents, and my dad know how to use the Helping Handles and where to find them.

4. Create the plan. You may want to write out the plan, delegating specific responsibilities, detailing where supplies can be found and indicating specific wishes. You also could map out the plan using graphics on sites like Canva. Or, perhaps you create a spreadsheet that includes contact information and notes.

5. Share the plan. You may share the plan with just your caree or with others in the family. You'll know best who needs to receive a copy of the plan. In addition, revisit the plan regularly to ensure it reflects the reality of the situation.

Our Certified Caregiving Consultants use tools, our Caregiving Wheels, which also can help you create plans for the worries. You can use these tools to inspire your planning process:

- Worry Wheel
- Plan Wheel

You'll find the Worry and Plan Wheels in our Resources section.

Name. Ask. Communicate. Create. Share. During our stressful days, we may feel powerless to the problems. We can add back control when we remember that every worry needs a plan.

Our Plan to Recover

We can give ourselves time to recover from difficult days, stressful experiences and overwhelming caregiving crises.

A caregiving experience is a stressful one.

In our simple stress survey, more than 1,200 family caregivers rated their stress level on a scale of 1 to 5 with 5 being the most stressed. The current number is 4.13.

Survey results indicate:

- 80% of survey respondents rated their stress level as a 4 or 5. Only one survey respondent rated their stress as a 1. Only 27 rated their stress as a 2.
- 71% of respondents say they miss their lives, which causes their stress.
- 63% say they don't sleep well at night.
- 60% say they haven't had a break.
- 54% say they don't have enough help.
- 53% say they don't have enough time.

We can't sleep, take a break and struggle to find help and enough time. Our days are long. Our caree's health crises are intense. How do we continue?

We need a Daily Recovery Plan, a plan to help us connect to comfort and solace after a rough day, a tough time and a caregiving crisis. The Recovery Plan helps you create a period of time (even a few minutes) for your mind, body and spirit to recover. In addition, you can plan for how your caree will recover by considering a new routine and adding help.

Your Recovery Plan

- What do you need? How can you receive it?
- What will help your mind, body and spirit recover?
- Who needs to know about your Recovery Plan? How will you share it with them?

Your Caree's Recovery Plan

- What does your caree need? What can you change, adjust, try or tweak?
- Who needs to know about your caree's Recovery Plan? How will you share it with them?

We've created two Caregiving Wheels, a Recovery Wheel and a Communicating Wheel, to help you create your plans. Use the Recovery Wheel to think through what you and your caree need to recover. Then, refer to the Communicating Wheel to create the plan for communicating with family members and providers. You'll find these Wheels as well as a Daily Recovery Plan in our Worksheets section.

Resources

- Sometimes, we need respite. Other times we need relief. Take our Relief or Respite Assessment to learn what you need.

Gaining Enough Peace of Mind During Caregiving

Our worries during our caregiving experience seem to steal our peace of mind and cause so much self-judgement. We can end our day with guilt that someone or something didn't get the attention we wanted to give them. We can begin our day with dread that we'll disappoint our family members, friend, co-workers and caree.

Rather than believing we regularly fall short, we can redefine what "enough" means to us.

For instance, you can adopt a compassionate perspective about how much you can accomplish during the day. Perhaps you create a Master To Do list from which you pull three items to complete every day. With a Master To Do list, you add everything that comes to mind. When you write down every task on the Master To Do list, you release a worry that you'll forget. With a shorter To Do list, you have a map for your day without the pressure to get it all done. You can give yourself time to tackle the tasks, one by one.

We also can ensure we have enough for ourselves. Perhaps you haven't been able to find enough time for your daily journal. Rather than going without, consider having a notebook handy to jot down quick thoughts and reflections. Rather than journaling for 30 minutes, you jot down simple sentences and phrases for five minutes. Given all you do, you can decide that five minutes is enough for right now. When you have more time, you'll write for a longer period of time.

Because we can feel we're constantly behind in our day, we also can change how we measure and define whether or not we're caught up.

In essence, we can be caught up right now. We can decide our long To Do list serves us better when it's three short reminders of today's priorities. We can decide that our life goals can shift when our life changes. We can decide that we'll adjust our budget so we save and spend in ways that work better for us right now. We can decide that arriving into each moment with our best intentions gives us a good start.

Questions to Find Enough

When you define being enough within your caregiving responsibilities, reflect on these questions:

- What's going well?
- What's a challenge?
- How can you help?
- How can others help?
- How can technology help?

When you gain clarity on the current challenge, you can brainstorm ways to involve others and technology. Technology that can help includes medical alert devices, automated check-in services and fall detection devices. With technology, you gain peace of mind that you have systems in place to alert you in case of a medical emergency.

Define the Current Needs

We often go through our days on auto-pilot because we worry if we stop so will our day. Sometimes, though, we need to drive manually in order to better understand the needs of the day and the opportunities to delegate.

When we understand the current needs, we can better find help that really helps. For instance, perhaps your caree recently experienced a decline. The decline means you do more in the morning to help your caree with personal care. When a decline happens, ask your caree's doctor to order an evaluation for home health benefits through Medicare and for services through palliative care. While the home health benefit will only provide help on a short-term basis, the extra help from a home health aide, visiting nurse and physical therapist will give you more time during your day.

Your caree may recover from a decline and the home health and palliative care benefits may stop for now. Because you can start these services for your caree again, think of the end of the benefits for now as a pause. When another decline happens, be ready to ask again for the benefits. My parents have been on and off home health and palliative care benefits since 2015.

Resilience Reflections

I also like to integrate a habit of compassionate thoughts and words which I call Resilience Reflections for myself and others. A Resilience Reflection is an "I love" statement:

- I love how well you advocated for yourself during the conversation.
- I love that you tackle your homework as soon as you get home from school.
- I love that I keep trying.

When I feel guilty for an impatient moment with my parents, I can release my guilt with this reflection: "I love how I moved on from a bad moment to give us a good day."

Surround with Support

Our stress can really drag down our days. Talking out what weighs heavy on our hearts can lighten our load. Connect to others who understand through an Employee Resource Group, Facebook groups or support groups. You also can connect to a therapist or a caregiving coach, like a Certified Caregiving Consultant.

In addition, ask these two questions during every interaction with a health care professional:

- Which benefits, services and programs can support and help my caree?
- Which benefits, services and programs can support and help me?

We can remember to measure how much we give over a period of time rather than by one short time. Perhaps you had a hurried conversation with your aging mother yesterday. Over the years, though, you've regularly engaged in thoughtful, kind conversations. It's what you've done over the years, not yesterday, that matters most. In addition, today gives you another opportunity, including a chance to say, "I was so pressed for time yesterday, Mom, that I'm looking forward to really catching up today."

We also can remember that we are not the only source of help, support and love. When you can't, know another can. We can encourage those in our lives to build a network that includes us but is not just us. We can do the same for ourselves. (See the next article about Love Substitutes.)

Enough Money Questions

We also worry about having enough money. We may avoid understanding a realistic picture of our financial situation because we worry it may be more dire than we think. Avoiding, though, means you can't get help and support. When you know your numbers, you can put plans in place to manage the numbers and access support . Check with your employer for any financial coaching programs available through your benefits package. If your employer doesn't offer financial coaching benefits, find a financial planner that can help you manage the budget.

You also may be trying to manage your caree's finances and budget. To better understand each financial situation, ask yourself and then your caree these questions:

- What's enough for today?
- What's enough for an emergency?
- How we will adjust when we need more when care needs increase?

Start with insights you gain from these answers and then research options in your community that can help, including by searching on benefitscheckup.org. Find out about qualifying criteria for programs and services and then regularly check back. Your caree may not qualify now for programs and services but may in the future. Consider using an app like Carefull to manage and track your caree's finances.

Peace of mind can feel so elusive to us during our difficult days. When we decide we can define what enough means for us today, we can have peace of mind.

Resources

- What's your caregiving day like? Tell us about your day, which we'll feature in The Caring Days newsletter.

A Tip for a Tough Day: Appoint a Love Substitute

The five traits of well-being, as described in Positive Psychology, are Hope, Gratitude, Zest, Curiosity and Giving and Receiving Love.

At times during our caregiving experience, we can feel like giving love to your caree just seems like an impossible task. When you can't, you feel incredibly guilty or awfully resentful. UGH!

Instead of feeling guilty or resentful, appoint a love substitute.

A love substitute can be a letter written to your caree from someone your caree loves. You can ask family members to regularly write letters to your caree. During those tough moments, when your caree needs love and you need a break, share one of the letters. That's a love substitute.

Take advantage of the times you do feel the love by writing a letter to your caree that expresses that love; this letter becomes a love substitute. When you feel empty and your caree needs to feel full, you can share your letter. "Here's something I wrote the other day," you can say, "I'd love to read it to you."

Love substitutes also may be a pet, a phone call from a family member, a video of a family member's wedding, a comforting photograph or a favorite song. It's okay that sometimes it's not you. Stock up with a stable of love substitutes for your caree. Knowing your caree can receive love from several sources — not just you — can help you feel like you have room to breathe and time to feel that you also are loved.

SECTION 4: MANAGING YOUR NEEDS

It’s hard to consider your needs when so many
in your life have such critical needs.
Your needs are just as important.

So many need you that you wonder how you’ll have enough for yourself. Your quality of life matters, too. In this section, we’ll support you as you consider your needs and put plans in place to manage them.

(Image by Gerd Altmann from Pixabay.)

Grace for Our Self-Care

Self-care takes time which feels so limited
during our working and caregiving days.

You'll regularly hear: "You have to put your oxygen mask on first and then you can take care of another."

Self-care during a caregiving experience is different from self-care before our caregiving experience. Because it's different, the over-used oxygen analogy just doesn't work.

We're faced with days when it's not just one person who needs our help putting on the oxygen mask. We're inundated with an overwhelming amount of requests and needs to manage.

In addition, there's a mask for everyone on the plane. In our real life, we often don't have enough time or resources or energy for everyone.

During our days, we often don't have enough masks for everyone.

A caregiving experience changes so much — our schedule, our energy, our resources, our hope. Because of all these changes, we have to find a new routine and habit for our self-care, which takes time. Developing that new schedule for our own self-care adds another level of stress to our days. We feel the pounds packing on to our middle section which leads to feelings of guilt and worry about the impact. That worry and guilt join that caregiving stress which already feels so big and overwhelming.

We need to be gracious with ourselves as we figure out what self-care looks like and feels like during caregiving. Maybe self-care starts with Netflix. When Netflix helps us relax and find energy, maybe self-care becomes fruit in the morning with breakfast. When fruit feels like an accomplishment, perhaps self-care expands into a 7-minute work-out three times a week.

I included a beautiful photo in this article of a luscious looking breakfast. That breakfast takes time, time which we often don’t have. Even the simple act of washing fruit can just feel like too much for us, especially during those days when we struggle with not having enough. For years, I thought, “I need to eat fruit in the morning.” I only found the time and energy to add fruit with my breakfast this year.

Over the years, I often thought about exercising early in the morning. Last summer, I adjusted my schedule to swim outside in our community pool at 7 a.m. That change to my schedule both satisfied and exhausted me. I loved the swim but the adjustment was stressful, which seems so odd.

Change, both good and bad, adds stress. During caregiving, especially the intense times of caregiving, we need the path of least resistance because we just can’t stomach another change.

We’re finding our process for how we take time and create a schedule for our own needs. When we’re in the middle of that process, which means we could still be on the couch watching Netflix, we need someone to say, “I see you taking care of yourself right now. You deserve this time.” If we hear, “I see you watching Netflix right now. You really need to take care of yourself. You have to put your oxygen mask on first,” we feel depleted from being misunderstood. That feeling of being judged keeps us on the couch.

We also may need to determine our self-care schedule that works when we feel a calmer time during caregiving and when we find ourselves in a crisis. Creating two kinds of schedules also requires time and energy.

When we feel that someone understands what we need and the challenges we encounter, we’ll have the energy for that next step in our self-care process. Self-care really begins with feeling accepted and understood. We need to receive grace — not guilt — about our self-care process.

Let’s figure out what self-care means to you.

Your Plan for Your Care

How in the world, when your world is full of too much to do with too few hands and too little time, do you take care of yourself?

You deserve a plan. Just like your caree has a plan of care, so do you.

I've created a care plan which you can use to create a weekly plan. In our care plan, we define WELL this way:

Wisdom comes from being attentive, grateful and curious.

Energy comes from your food, your exercise and your breaks.

Laughter comes from within, from your relationships and from your entertainment.

Love comes from within, from your relationships and from your passions.

To keep you from falling into the well, you'll also add thoughts in your care plan about forgiving yourself, family members, friends, your caree, the disease process and whatever else causes you pain and sorrow. Because forgiveness is a work in progress, you also can include comments on where you are in the process.

To help you complete your care plan, I've included a blank plan and then an example of a completed care plan on the following pages. Your Worksheets section includes a plan for your use.

My Plan for My Well-Being

My care plan focuses on my WELL:

- **Wisdom** comes from being attentive, grateful and curious.
- **Energy** comes from my food, my exercise and my physical, mental, spiritual and emotional breaks.
- **Laughter** comes from within myself, from my relationships and from my entertainment.
- **Love** comes from within myself, from my relationships and from my passions.

During the week of _______, I make the following commitments to staying WELL:

I stay attentive to:

I am grateful for:

I am curious about:

My food choices include:

My exercise routine is:

I take breaks:
- for my body:
- for my mind:
- for my spirit:
- for my heart:

I laugh about:

I laugh with:

I laugh while:

I love when I:

I love:

I love participating in these activities:

I forgive:

I am working on forgiving:

My Plan for My Well-Being

My Care Plan for the Week of May 8, 2022

I stay attentive to: my bedtime, so I get enough sleep

I am grateful for: all those who help me

I am curious about: how individuals overcome tough personal situations so I'll ask the librarian for suggestions on good autobiographies

My food choices include: peanut butter on whole grain toast at 10 a.m., salads for lunch and fruit for a 3 p.m. snack. Dinner will include the foods I love.

My exercise routine is: a 30-minute walk after dinner five times a week

I take breaks:
- **for my body:** I'll take a break to enjoy music each afternoon to give my body a rest
- **for my mind:** I'll take a break from my worries by working on my vision board on Sunday afternoon
- **for my spirit:** I'll begin each day with five minutes of meditation
- **for my heart:** I'll connect with other family caregivers at least weekly to share and support

I laugh about: the funny moments in my day

I laugh with: my friends whenever I can

I laugh while: I watch my TV shows, especially *Modern Family*

I love when I: stand up for what I need and speak my mind

I love: my family members and friends

I love participating in these activities: reading and writing so will make time for each every day

I forgive: myself for being impatient and my sister for not helping

I am working on forgiving: myself for past decisions. To help me with this process, I'll journal for a few moments about those past decisions.

Signed: Denise M. Brown Date: May 8, 2022

Finding the Fluid Motion of Priorities

Priorities can be flexible pieces in our day's puzzle.

I recently heard someone say that we human beings like structure and order. When something does not make sense, we look for and sometimes create explanations.

During times of stress and uncertainty, when nothing makes sense, I wonder what life is really about.

I asked a friend, "Is life about sacrifices? Do we sacrifice so ultimately we can get what we want?"

"Absolutely not," she answered. "Anyone who makes a life out of sacrifices is simply a martyr. I don't believe any Higher Being would want our lives to be about sacrifices."

"Then is life about compromises?" I asked. "Do we compromise, taking the bad with the good, to get what we want?"

"No, it's not about that, either," she replied. "Compromises can be a part of life, but it's not what life is."

After pondering this for a night, I wondered if our priorities could be the answer.

When difficult times come our way, do we survive by re-prioritizing and by making sure our pressing needs top our to-do list? Is prioritizing a survival instinct? Do we prioritize or perish?

I do believe we continue by prioritizing. I also think our challenge becomes understanding that our priorities can change as our life and our life's circumstances change.

We tend to put the pressing needs at the top of our list. Our caree certainly has significant, sometimes critical, needs. As caregiving lasts from one year to the next and into the next, we can't keep going in a healthy way if our life revolves around only one priority. Others we love must be priorities, too, otherwise we sacrifice those relationships.

We also can make ourselves a priority once in a while. We practice this by making ourselves a priority for a minute by taking several seconds to close our eyes and breathe. We then expand those seconds into a few minutes by stepping outside to take in nature's sights and sounds. When we feel comfortable with those few moments, we can turn them into a few hours. We might hire a home health aide to be with our caree so we can spend a few hours at the local library.

Our perspective on our priorities will shift during our caregiving experience. Any time we shift, we need time to adjust. An adjustment may be painful as we work through our own guilt and others, like our caree, resist our shift. Rather than giving up because the adjustment hurts, we can commit to the process of discovering our priorities and their timing.

We can think of our priorities as a series of actions rather than as a list written in permanent marker. A priority at any given moment in time can be:

Achieving
Being
Believing
Caregiving
Enjoying
Loving
Receiving
Resolving

In this moment, your priority may be receiving this information. In the next hour, your priority may be enjoying time with your kids or grandkids. After that priority, caregiving may be the focus.

Fluid priorities become simple motions within our day. Our priorities aren't about choosing one over the other but about embracing the opportunity we have right now to make the most of what is. To help you find your priority, we included a Priority Wheel in your Worksheets section.

When we give ourselves permission to look at our priorities as flexible pieces in our puzzle, we give ourselves a fighting chance during a tough time. We continue.

(Image by RitaE from Pixabay)

Section 5: Grieving

Our grief can feel like it will swallow us.

After a significant loss, we feel the power of our grief, which can be feel like waves on some days, like a hurricane on another and like the darkest of stormy nights on another. Our grief comes with us to work, which can leave us feeling unsettled and unsure. In this section, we offer tools that can help you manage your grief. We also offer words to use when a co-worker experiences his own loss.

Your Plan for Daily Healing

A terrible loss happened to you. That's awful enough. One loss, though, can lead to more. Your parent dies and then your siblings battle you over the money. Your spouse receives a life-altering diagnosis and then you struggle to keep your job because you cannot find help to hire so you can focus on work.

Finding the support to manage the impact of one loss feels hard enough. How can you cope with all the losses that pile on top of the major loss? You feel like loss surrounds and almost suffocates you.

To help, I've created a three-step process that prompts you to name the pain, the healing strategy and the healing outcome. Reflect on these three questions to find your way to healing:

1. What are you healing through?
2. What are you healing with?
3. What are you healing to?

Your answers to the first question, **What are you healing through?**, could be:

- Family member's death
- Disappointment
- Changes
- Difficulties
- Challenges
- Burn-out
- Stress
- Worries
- An Ending
- Weight Gain
- Health challenge
- Broken heart
- Crisis of faith
- Financial difficulties

Your answers to the second question, **What are you healing with?**, could be:

- Movement
- Words (spoken and written)
- Connections
- Music
- Prayer
- Solitude
- Essential oils

- Boundaries
- Rituals
- Adjustments
- Sleep
- Books
- Time
- Movies
- Activity
- Nature
- Podcasts
- Videos
- Creativity
- Counselor, therapist, coach or consultant

Your answers to the third question, **What are you healing to?**, could be:

- Peace
- Comfort
- Forgiveness
- Acceptance
- New ways
- Opportunities
- Letting go
- Love
- Calm
- Wisdom
- Mindset
- Wellness
- Courage
- Decisions
- Change
- Abundance
- Faith
- Transformation

Here's how the process can work:

Example No. 1: A family member makes an insensitive comment to you that just hurts.

After reflecting on the three-question process, you create the following statement:

I am healing through insensitivity with words to be assertive.

(Have a response ready for the next time you encounter this insensitive family member.)

Example No. 2: It's just not possible to get together with friends for your weekly Zoom check-in call.

After reflecting on the three questions, you create the following statement:

I am healing through disappointment with my daily walk to let go.

(You decide to move to stay healthy.)

Example No. 3 takes our process a little deeper: It's just not possible to get together with friends for your weekly Zoom check-in call. These check-in calls mean so much to you. You feel like you've made so many sacrifices lately and another sacrifice just hurts.

After reflecting on the three questions, you create the following statement:

I am healing through disappointment with my daily walk while I give thanks to my friends who understand me to find peace.

(You move to stay healthy. You stay connected with your gratitudes to feel the love.)

The Day Healing Plan helps you track your healing strategies and outcomes so you have a library of your own healing options. Documenting how you implement this three-question process and then reflecting on what works reminds you that you have tools you can use.

You hurt. You also can heal.

Be the Compassionate Colleague Who Offers Support After Loss

When a colleague returns to work after a family member's death, you may worry about what to say. The worry can lead you to avoid your colleague, which leaves you feeling guilty and regretful.

Our helpful tips, below, ensure you are a compassionate companion for your colleague by offering your support after loss.

1. Read the obituary. (If there isn't an obituary, please skip to No. 2.)

When you connect with your colleague after his or her bereavement leave, smile from your kind heart and share something meaningful you learned by reading the obituary.

You can say:

"I read the obituary. Your family member led such an interesting life."

"I read the obituary. Your (insert relationship) sounds (lovely, so interesting, truly committed to family, a great member of the community)."

"I read the obituary. I loved learning that your (insert relationship) accomplished (so much in her career, in our community, in her life)."

"I read the obituary. I'm grateful for your (insert relationship) and her/his service to our country."

2. If there isn't an obituary, smile from your kind heart and say:

"I was so sorry to hear about (insert relationship). What was he/she like?"

3. If you'd like, you can extend an offer of support.

"I'd love to connect over lunch. When's a good day for you?"

During lunch, you can ask:

"How has the return to work been for you?"
"Who's been most supportive to you?"
"What's been most helpful for you?"
"What's most challenging right now?"
"What can we do at work to continue to support you?"

4. Try to avoid the following question:

"How did he or she die?"

It's the death and loss that matters. The circumstances don't. If your colleague wants to share the circumstances, then simply listen.

5. At times, you may struggle to find the right words or worry that you'll say the wrong words. Acknowledge your struggle.

When you don't have words because the family member's death was a terrible tragedy, you can say:

"I just don't even know what to say. This is just tragic."

"I'm just at a loss for words. This is just awful."

When you feel out of words, you can say:
"I want to use words that feel helpful and comforting to you. What words of support do you like to receive?"

6. You can check in on your colleague on a regular basis if you'd like. You can say:

"I was thinking of you and wondering how your day is going so far."

7. When your colleague is obviously struggling, you can say:

"Today seems to be taking its toll on you. Tell me what's going on."

"Today's a tough one, I think. How can I help?"

About Smiling
Smile from the heart. Your smile feels warm to the receiver and provides comfort.

About Listening
Listen with quiet, focused attention.

About Wrong Words
Even with our best intentions, we may inadvertently say something that we later regret or that seems to upset our colleague. If that happens, simply apologize.

"I'm so sorry I misspoke yesterday."

About Gratitude
You can give thanks to your colleague for coming to work, for sharing and for being honest. Your gratitude will be appreciated. You can say:

“Thank you for being here today.”

“Thank you for sharing about your (mother, father, sister, etc.). I’m grateful to know her/him through you.”

“Thank you for telling me how you’re doing. I hope it helped to talk it out with me.”

Thank you for your kindness and compassion. You will make a difference to your colleagues returning to work after loss.

SECTION 6: RESOURCES

You deserve help that helps.

Keeping a life during a life of caregiving can feel like a tall order. How do you cope with the pressure, the stress, the worries, the needs and stay present in your career, your priorities, your relationships? How do you stay your best while getting the best for your caree?

In this section, we offers resources which can help. Our ideas for resource include professionals you can hire, a strategy you can implement and organizations that can support you.

Hiring the Right Professional

A professional, like a therapist, coach or consultant, can be a huge help as you navigate the caregiving experience. We offer suggestions to help you choose the professional right for you:

If you want to heal a past pain, then a therapist will be the right choice for you. A therapist can help you cope with the past and its impact on the present while putting strategies together so you are ready for the future. For instance, a therapist can help if you struggle caring for a family member because of a past abusive relationship. In addition, the right therapist can help you heal from PTSD and the impact of the abusive relationship on you. If you work, check with your employer's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) to learn if you have free counseling sessions available to you.

If you would like a professional assessment of your caree's situation, then an Aging Life Care Specialist can help. (Aging Life Care Specialists used to be called geriatric care managers.) Typically a nurse or social worker, an Aging Life Care Specialist can recommend services and programs for your caree, can put plans in place so your caree remains safe at home and can help manage your caree's team of home care workers. The Aging Life Care Specialist focuses on your caree's needs because of their specialization in the aging process. You also can check with your employer's EAP to see if you have a benefit that offers free consultations with an Aging Life Care Specialist.

If you would like help for yourself, then connect with one of our Certified Caregiving Consultants (CCC), who have an expertise in the caregiving experience. A CCC can help you understand your priorities, create coping strategies and manage your stress. CCCs can help you find the right facilities, agencies, resources, products and services for you and your caree. In addition, CCCs can brainstorm solutions with you and provide an empathetic ear so you can vent without guilt. Our CCCs also have a personal caregiving experience, which means they bring an understanding of the experience into their work. The CCCs focus on you because of their specialization in the caregiving experience.

If you want to focus on achieving your own personal goals during a caregiving experience, you could hire a life coach to help. Life coaches help you start where you are to move forward into achieving personal or career successes. Many life coaches specialize in helping you with specific life goals, like losing weight, changing careers or writing a book.

You can use these professionals in any way that works for you. Perhaps you hire an Aging Life Care Specialist every January to assess your caree and review what additional services or programs your caree may need.

You may want to take advantage of free sessions with counselors available through your company's EAP every year. When you exhaust the free sessions, you can hire a CCC or life coach. Maybe you hire a CCC for monthly sessions so you can talk it out with a professional who gets it so that you can hear the right solutions. Perhaps you hire a coach or therapist or CCC for quarterly sessions each year. Whatever will work for you works.

Ask Yourself Good Questions

For the past ten years, I've been using questions to help me cope with difficult challenges and to manage my stress. For instance, I recently worked through an overwhelming situation by asking myself this question:

"In what wonderful, marvelous, lucrative way will this work out for me?"

I just put the situation in my past because it did work out in a wonderful, marvelous, lucrative way.

I learned the technique of asking myself good questions through my life coach training completed in 2004 and because of Elizabeth Lombardo, the author of A Happy You, Your Ultimate Prescription for Happiness.With a good question, I can pivot my thoughts, open up my mind to possibilities, and let go of trying to figure out every detail to solve an overwhelming problem.

I also can ask myself a good question in the morning in order to set my intention for the day. I ask questions like:

How can I weed my relationship garden today?

What's my truth today?

Who can I thank today?

What will be useful for me today?

Who will bless me today?

Which unhealthy habit will I quit today?

How will I bring quality to my day?

What's possible for me today?

Which solution will find me today?

How will the friendly world help me today?

When I ask these good questions, my mind looks for the good answers, solutions and actions. Rather than feeling overwhelmed by next steps to take, I can trust that the right path will unfold for me.

Resources

- If you'd like inspiration to create your questions, subscribe to my weekly newsletter, Sunday Question, to receive an intention in the form of a question on Sunday mornings.

Your Contingency Plan

With a plan, you have ready-to-go actions.

What if I'm sick? Who will take care of my caree?

What if I need to help my daughter and her new baby? Who will take care of my caree?

What if I need to go back to work? Who will take care of my caree?

These questions, which can seem to plague, actually are helpful--they propel you to create your contingency plan.

Here's how to create your plan:

Research is your first step. If you haven't called local social services agencies and services providers (including churches and synagogues) in more than one year, then start by checking with them. Funding changes, personnel changes, goals and missions change. An agency that couldn't help in the past now may have a program that will help you.

Remember: Your goal is to gather as much information as possible. If you learn about a program that you don't think your caree will like...wipe the thought from your head! Gather information about all programs — costs, availability, qualifications, contact person. The program may not be appropriate now, but may very well be the answer to your prayers down the road.

Next, check with family and friends. In an emergency, what kind of help can they offer? Who will be the second contact in case of an emergency?

Once you've researched all available options in the community and with your family and friends, then make a list. Include agency name, program name, program description, program details (cost, availability, etc.), agency phone number. You may also want to jot down appropriate times for these services to be used. For instance, short-term stays in nursing homes could be used when you need to take a week off.

During this process, you also can create your safety net, the net that catches when something falls. Consider:

Financial safety net

Who manages the finances? Who's the back-up? Who checks to make sure finances are in good order?

Day-to-day caregiving

Who can back you up? Who can step in if you are sick? Your back-up can be family, friends, home care agencies, adult day services, assisted living facilities, nursing homes, Meals on Wheels, volunteer programs, personal emergency responses, phone check-in services, or a combination. What knowledge and training does your back-up need? What's your back-up for your back-up?

Losses

As your caree declines, how will you compensate for the losses? How will you manage when your caree can no longer drive and manage household responsibilities? What will need to change when caregiving needs intensify? Which services, family members, providers and other options can compensate for the losses?

You're out of commission

The flu, unexpected responsibilities, or a sore back makes caregiving that much more difficult. What gadgets and equipment can help until you feel beer?

As a family caregiver, you know that the world can change without warning. You don't want to be caught off guard and without options. Your contingency plan and safety net ensure the well-being of you and your caree just in case "What if" really happens.

Resources

- How well is your team prepared to manage when a team member has an unplanned absence? Take our assessment, How Well Is Your Team Prepared?.

Your Bad Weather Back-Up

You watch the snow build from your office window. Or, you watch the storm clouds roll in; you know another doozy is on its way. You're supposed to stop at your mom's house on your way home from work. If you stop to help her, you wonder how you'll ever make it home. If you don't stop to help her though...

When bad weather comes between you and your caree, consider these quick tips:

1. Check with your caree's physician and specialists for suggestions on how to ensure your caree is safe during weather emergencies.

2. If your caree receives care from a home health aide hired through a home care agency, **check with the agency's director to determine its protocol during snowstorms**. If an aide can't make it to work, will another be assigned? What other options are available?

3. If your caree relies on important regular treatments (dialysis, chemotherapy, wound care, oxygen delivery), **work with the service provider to create a safe back-up plan**.

4. If you've hired a home care worker privately, **be sure to create a back-up plan if the home care worker must cancel because of weather conditions**. (Use this back-up plan year-round and if your home care worker becomes ill, quits, or just doesn't work out.)

5. If you have family in the area and they regularly help, **create a "tag team" system that you can use during a weather emergency**. Determine which family member will stop at your caree's home, which family member is the back-up and how communication between the "tag team" will occur.

6. **Keep extra caregiving supplies** (incontinence supplies, over-the-counter medications, medications, canned goods, frozen meals) and extra boredom-fighting supplies (books, videos, puzzles, crossword puzzles, stationery) on hand at your caree's house and at your house, just in case.

7. **Create a space in your caree's house for your own personal supplies like** a change of clothes, toiletries, medications that you may need in case you must spend the night.

8. **Use online services to order medications and food** for delivery to your caree's home.

9. **Check with your caree's town and county about assistance they offer** to homebound and/or frail older adults during weather emergencies. You can call the ElderCare Locator at 1-800-677-1116 for a referral to the Area Agency on Aging in your caree's community.

10. **Ask neighbors of your caree if they can pitch in by stopping to check on your caree**. Let them know how they can reach you in case of an emergency. Be sure someone you trust who

lives near your caree's home has an extra set of keys.

11. **Hire teenagers in your caree's neighborhood to shovel.**

12. If your caree lives in a rural area or has a long walk to the mailbox, **check with the local post office to ensure that mail delivery occurs at your caree's front door**.

13. **Check with your manager, your employer's Work/Life benefit and Human Resources department** to learn about your options if you must miss work to stay home with your caree. In addition, your Employee Assistance Program may provide help to research community options for you as well as free counseling sessions to talk out your worries. If your organization doesn't offer an Employee Assistance Program, join The Caregiving Department, a free benefit for all family caregivers at CaringOurWay.com.

14. **Check with current services that you use** (adult day centers, Meals on Wheels, volunteer programs, phone check-in programs, senior centers) and ask about their protocol during a weather emergency. Ask for their suggestions to fill any voids in care.

Managing the Worry of Another Emergency

Because so much can go wrong it an instant, our worries during caregiving make sense.

Worry is the defining emotion of our caregiving experience.

In October 2021, LifeStation, a medical alert monitoring system, released its first-ever Positive Aging Quotient. The research, which surveyed over 900 Americans over the age of 55 who are current or future caregivers of an older adult, examined the impacts of caregiving responsibilities on everyday life from work to mental health. (Note: I have a paid partnership with LifeStation. This article reflects my own perspectives, experiences and ideas.)

A few insights from the research stood out to me:

- 97% of current caregivers feel it is at least moderately important to plan ahead for another disruptive event.
- Survey respondents shared their fears that their family member has died, has hurt themselves or has fallen when they don't hear from their carees.

Worry is the defining emotion of our caregiving experience because we know our carees' frailty or disease process can create an emergency at any time. One moment all is fine and the next moment all is chaos. We do our best to move through our day but we're keeping our cell phone within reach, just in case. We do our best to get our rest at night but we're sleeping next to our always-on cell phone, just in case.

We're always on, ready to act because we know the status quo isn't a permanent caregiving situation. It seems like the constant during caregiving is change.

How do we keep our life when our life includes so many worries? A few suggestions:

1. **Our quality of life matters, too.** We focus so much on our caree's safety and well-being. Consider what gives quality to your life. How can you adjust your day and your schedule to improve your quality of life?

2. **If you can, create an on-call schedule so that you get a break from being the one who's always on alert.** Perhaps you have a family member who could be on call in case of an emergency one Saturday afternoon a month. During that Saturday, you can turn off your cell phone while you catch up on your sleep. Share information that your on-call replacement will need so he or she can manage the emergency until you turn your phone back on.

3. **Create a plan for your worries.** We'd love for you to join us for our free monthly Family Emergency Planning sessions on the fourth Friday at 1 p.m. ET. You can talk out a worry with us and we'll talk out what a plan could look like for that worry.

4. **Be patiently engaged in the process of you caree's technology adoption.** We know our carees need medical alerts; we also know the challenge getting our carees to agree to use the technology. In its Positive Aging Quotient research, LifeStation notes that 70% of the aging adults in our lives are not completely comfortable with the latest technology. The battle with our caree to use technology can feel awful. Rather than engaging in a battle, be okay with a process that involves on-going discussions. I started the conversation with my parents in 2016. "We're not ready," they said. Fast forward to today; they both use a medical alert device because of my mom's Parkinson's diagnosis and my dad's recent falls. Re-visit the conversation with your caree when the time feels right for you, knowing that the process may take time. Although the process may feel frustrating, stick with it.

5. **Use technology in the way it helps you.** While you wait for your caree to agree to using technology, research how technology can help you streamline your tasks and your responsibilities.

6. **Create a Fall Squad, an idea I presented during our virtual event, Care and Share: Our Big Ideas.** We can feel like it's all up to us when a fall happens which is a lonely feeling. Ask others to be available to help so that you know who to call in case there's no injury and you need an extra pair of hands to safely help your caree up. I've called my brother-in-law to help when my mom has fallen. I have Helping Handles at my parents' apartment and in my apartment to help. You also can check with the fire department in your caree's community to learn what

help they can provide. The idea of help helps and that can help alleviate a worry. You know who to call when you need help.

7. **We can plan but we can't control.** It's not our responsibility to control what can't be controlled — a disease progression, our caree's natural cycle of life.

8. Our interventions in the past saved our caree's life which can put so much pressure on us to always be that saving intervention. We can do our best but we can't expect that we will always be able to prevent the unpreventable. It's okay to be human which means we can't be two places at the same time and we can't predict what may happen next. It's okay to keep your life as much as you can during your life of caregiving. **Sacrificing your life to be available all the time will be too high a price to pay.**

9. When something goes wrong, we can blame ourselves. You didn't cause a decline or a fall or an emergency. Rather than judge, be compassionate. **During these emergencies, you need care, too.**

10. The falls and medical emergencies can be so traumatic. **Just as your caree needs time to recover, so do you.** Talk out with the events with a supportive resource, like a Certified Caregiving Consultant or therapist.

11. Because we managed so many of our caree's medical emergencies in the past, we can default to living with the idea that medical emergencies always will be part of our present. In this moment, everyone may be okay but you're still expecting something to go wrong. Living in a constant state of anticipation is just hard. We can worry so much that we begin to live in the future rather than focusing on the moment. **Right now, focus on what's okay.** You are okay.

As you manage your worries, be sure to take regular breaks from worrying. In our Worksheets section, you'll find a Worry Release Meter to help you let go of your worries even for a few moments.

Planning Sessions

We offer free monthly planning sessions to help you to create caregiving plans. Our planning sessions include:

A Plan for You After a Family Member's Diagnosis: How do you manage after a family member's diagnosis? Join us on the first Tuesday at 1 p.m. ET to talk it out, figure it out and plan it out.

Caregiving Recovery Plan: After an intense period, like a hospitalization or decline, you and your caree deserve a Caregiving Recovery Plan. Join us on third Tuesday at 1 p.m. ET to create plans to recover.

Family Emergency Planning: Connect with a Certified Caregiving Consultant on the fourth Friday at 1 p.m. ET to create your plans for the "What ifs?".

Get Paid for Giving Care: The direct care workforce shortage means families may not be able to hire outside help. We help you create plans to hire a family member. Join us on the second Friday at 3 p.m. ET.

Respite In Place Planning: When you can't leave, we'll help you get a break right where you are. We'll help you put a Respite In Place plan so you can create a space to call your own in your home, your yard and your community. Join us on the second Tuesday at 1 p.m. ET.

Register to join us through Your Caregiving Department on CaringOurWay.com.

SECTION 7: WORKSHEETS

Our worksheets help you receive comfort and insights.

You'll find worksheets to help you create your:

The Setback Exercise

Worry and Plan Wheels

Recovery and Communicating Wheels

Daily Recovery Plan

The Worry Release Meter

My Plan for My Well-Being

Priority Wheel

Caregiving Resources

Daily Healing Plan

Compassionate Words for a Grieving Colleague

Be sure to join us at Your Caregiving Department for assessments, support and events. You also can connect with a Certified Caregiving Consultant for one-on-one coaching.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Denise M. Brown

Denise began supporting family caregivers in 1990 and launched a business to help them in 1995. She created one of the first online caregiving communities in 1996 which she managed until its sale in 2020. She now develops and delivers caregiving training programs for the workplace and for individuals who want to coach family caregivers. More than 300 individuals from six different countries have enrolled in her training programs offered through her company, The Caregiving Years Training Academy.

Denise began helping her parents in 2004 after her father's bladder cancer diagnosis. Her parents, now 90 and 87, live near Denise in their own apartment. Denise's brother died suddenly in August 2021.

Next Avenue named Denise a 2017 Influencer in Aging, one of "50 advocates, researchers, thought leaders, innovators, writers and experts who continue to push beyond traditional boundaries and change our understanding of what it means to grow older." Her insights have been featured in *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, *US News & World Report*, *USA Today*, SmartMoney.com, *Time* magazine and *Chicago Tribune*.

Denise is the author of several books which help you manage your caregiving and after-caregiving experiences, including:

- The Caregiving Years, Navigating the Six Caregiving Stages;

- Take Comfort (four-book series);
- Healing Words, Soothing Strategies for Your Caregiving Fatigues;
- After Caregiving Ends, A Guide to Beginning Again.

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