The term “caregiver” refers to all the people in a person’s immediate circle of care, including family members and other significant people who provide unpaid support to a person in need.
Taking Care of Yourself the Caregiver

What is a Caregiver?
The term “caregiver” refers to all the people involved in a person’s immediate circle of care, including family members and other significant people who provide unpaid support to a person in need. Over half a million Canadians are caregivers to people living with mental health challenges or illnesses. Over half (55%) of these caregivers feel worried or anxious because of their responsibilities. Other things people feel when caring for someone include:

- tired (51%)
- short-tempered or irritable (36%)
- overwhelmed (35%)
- disturbed sleep (34%)\(^\text{10}\)

More Information

How to Take Care of Yourself, the Caregiver
Caregivers play a significant role in supporting the health and recovery process for people living with mental health challenges or illnesses and it is important that they take care of themselves FIRST so they can continue being a healthy caregiver.

Taking time for your own self-care needs to be planned into each day. Caregivers need many resources to help them stay well and to support them to have a rewarding relationship with the individual for whom they provide care.

Additional Resources
Resources are hyperlinked. If printing the activity guide, please review resources online.

Websites

English:

French only:
Guide des proches aidants en santé mentale
Guide de ressources : Grande région d’Ottawa


Activity 1: All Mixed-Up

Goal

- Think about your feelings as a caregiver.

Messages

- Your caregiving experience is unique to your own situation.
- Caring for someone with mental illnesses or experiencing mental health challenges is rewarding and difficult.
- It is natural to have positive and negative feelings as a caregiver.
- Let yourself feel your emotions and try not to judge them. Think about how these feelings affect your actions and affect how you care for your loved one.

Time

- 15 minutes (depending on the size of the group)

Supplies

- Video: Caring for You, the Caregiver
- Flip chart paper, markers and pens

Facilitator Steps

2. Say to the participants “In the video, Samira feels conflicted between caring for her sister Aiyana and seeing her friends and travelling”.
3. Ask participants when they have felt conflicted.
4. Break into small groups and provide each group with flip chart paper and markers.
5. Each flip chart paper should have title “negative feelings” and “positive feelings” at the top.
6. Ask participants to brainstorm “positive feelings” and “negative feelings” they may have as a caregiver. Write them on the flip chart.
7. Ask each group to share their notes and why they categorized each feeling as positive or negative.

Possible Participants’ Answers

Negative Feelings:
- Anxiety
- Fear
- Guilt
- Frustration, anger and resentment
- Hurt
- Lonely
- Grief
- Sadness

Positive Feelings:
- Personal growth
- More appreciation for health
- Stronger relationship with the person you are caring for
- Feel good about doing something to help
- Learning new skills

Facilitator tip: It is important to talk with the group about how we sometimes judge our feelings as positive or negative. In fact, “How you feel is how you feel”. It is important to acknowledge your feelings and not judge them. You need to understand your feelings, how they affect your actions and can affect how you care for your loved one.

Facilitator can refer to the Mental Health and Substance Use list found at haveTHATtalk.ca.

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11 Activities 1 to 4 are adapted from: Ottawa Public Health; Canadian Mental Health Association; Canadian Public Health Association; Mental Illness Caregivers Association; Military Family Services. (2016). Mental Health Caregiver Guide: A guide for caregivers of persons living with mental illness or experiencing mental health challenges. ON: Ottawa Public Health
It is important to **reach out** and **talk** to someone you **trust**, to a health professional or counselor about your mental health.
Activity 2: Caregiver Matter—Agree or Disagree

Goal
• To reflect on your personal beliefs that influence how you care for others and yourself

Messages
• You have to take care of yourself FIRST so that you can take care of others.
• Reach out to family, friends or your community for support.
• Talk to someone your trust, your health professional or counselor about your mental health.

Time
• 15 minutes (depending on the size of the group)

Supplies
• Video: Caring for You, the Caregiver
• List of statements below
• Wall signs for “AGREE” and “DISAGREE”
• Tape

Facilitator Steps
2. Tape an “AGREE” sign on one side of the room and a “DISAGREE” sign on the other side.
3. Read the statements below and ask the participants to stand under the sign that shows how they feel. There are no right or wrong answer and they may want to stand between the signs.
   a. I feel selfish if I sleep in or do something for myself.
   b. I am overworked and need time off but I can’t take time off.
   c. I don’t want to bother other people and ask for help. They have their own problems and lives.
   d. The person I care for is my priority.
4. Ask if anyone would like to share why they decided to stand where they are.

Possible Participants’ Answers
Notice where participants are standing:
• Being a caregiver can be both rewarding and difficult.
• Our beliefs and feelings about being a caregiver are not wrong, but they can stop us from taking care of ourselves and reaching out for help.
• We need to be aware of our beliefs and feelings and how they affect our mental health.
• Sometimes our feelings stop us from asking for help or accepting help.
Keep in mind that some participants might have feelings that are **not positive or negative** (they may be in the middle). This activity helps them reflect and explore their feelings. There are no right or wrong answers.
**Activity 3: Finding Balance**

**Goal**
- To identify ways to take care of yourself and find balance in your life

**Messages**
- It is important to set limits, so you have time to take care of yourself.
- There are times when you might have to say “no”. That is okay.
- Set realistic goals for yourself and the person you care for.
- Plan to do something for yourself each day that you enjoy.

**Time**
- 15-20 minutes (depending on the size of the group)

**Supplies**
- Video: Caring for You, the Caregiver.
- 2 wall signs – “set limits” and “self-care ideas”
- Flip chart paper and markers, Post-it notes and pens
- One copy of Caregiver Bill of Rights for each participant (page 43).

**Facilitator Steps**
2. Say to the participants “Samira is trying to find balance in her life between caring for her sister, her responsibilities at work and her personal life”.
3. Ask participants to think about the strategies in the video that helped or could help Samira manage her role as a caregiver.
4. Write answers on the flip chart paper.
5. Tape “set limits” and “self-care ideas” signs on the wall.
6. Give each participant post-it notes and a pen.
7. Ask each participant to write ideas about setting limits that have helped them and ideas of ways to take care of themselves.
8. Ask participant to post their ideas under either the “set limits” or the “self-care ideas” wall signs.
9. Ask participants to share their ideas with the larger group.

**Possible Participants’ Answers**
Samira could:
- Talk to her boss about flexible hours.
- Talk to a counselor.
- Join a support group.
- Plan how many hours a week she needs to balance her life, such as time to take care of herself and her sister.
- Ask her family and friends for help.
- Ask for support from community service agencies.
- Plan ahead of time for unexpected events and emergencies with her sister.
Set Limits:
• Talk honestly to the person you care for about how much time you have for them.
• Explain the other things in your life that take your time...dog, work, groceries.
• Ask the person you care for if they have ideas about other ways to save time or get support.

Self-Care:
• Go for coffee with friend
• Take a bubble bath
• Meditate in the morning before work
• Go for a walk with partner
• Call a friend
• Read
• Watch a comedy show/movie

It is important to plan time so you can take care of your own mental and physical health.
Caregiver’s Bill of Rights

I have the right to:

1. Connect with myself and my own unique experience as a caregiver. I acknowledge and confront my thoughts and behaviours when I can, but at times, I give myself permission to avoid these and do something fun and distracting.

2. Take care of myself. This is not selfish. It will give me the energy to take better care of the person I care for.

3. Get help from others even if the person I care for disagrees. I know my limits and do only what I can do.

4. Keep parts of my own life that do not include the person I care for. I have my own identity and my own life outside of caregiving.

5. Do some things just for myself, whenever I want.

6. Get angry, feel depressed, and talk about difficult feelings I experience.

7. Get consideration, affection, forgiveness, and acceptance for what I do for the person I care for and don’t let the person I care for control me by using guilt, anger or depression.

8. Take pride in what I am doing. To be proud of the courage it has taken me to meet the needs of the person I care for.

9. Make a life for myself that will help me ensure that I will continue to have a sense of purpose and happiness when the individual I care for no longer needs my help.

10. Expect and demand improvements in resources to help and support caregivers.

11. Add my own statements of rights to this list, based on my own unique situation, feelings and experiences.

Adapted from: Ottawa Public Health; Canadian Mental Health Association; Canadian Public Health Association; Mental Illness Caregivers Association; Military Family Services. (2016). Mental Health Caregiver Guide: A guide for caregivers of persons living with mental illness or experiencing mental health challenges. ON: Ottawa Public Health
Activity 4: Reaching Out

Goal
• To develop a personal plan to help you identify how and where to get help

Messages
• Caregivers’ responsibilities can look different based on the needs of the person to whom you provide care.
• Learning to be a caregiver takes time. It is important to learn when to ask for help, where to get help, and to accept help when someone offers to help.

Time
• 20 to 30 minutes (depending on the size of the group)

Supplies
• Video: Caring for You, the Caregiver
• Flip chart paper and makers

Facilitator Steps
1. Watch the video: Caring for You, the Caregiver.
2. Say to participants “It is important to know your needs in order to know who can help you and how they can help you.
3. Ask participants “What comes to mind when you think of a support network?”.
4. Write on flip chart paper the 3 questions below:
   1. What do you need?
   2. Who could help you?
   3. How can they help you?
5. Give each participant a copy of the example “Creating My Support Network” and a copy of the blank version.

Possible Participants’ Answers
Ideas of a support network:
• Informal supports may be family, neighbours or friends.
• Formal supports may be doctor, social worker, counselor, community service agencies, support workers.
• Unique supports may be a specific support group, faith or spiritual group.

Facilitator tip: Go around the room to talk with each participant to answer any questions and provide ideas of resources that may provide support.

Facilitator can:
• Provide the participants with a link to the Mental Health Caregiver Guide to help them build more skills to help bring balance to their own life.
• Provide link to Resource Guide: Greater Ottawa Area and 211 to find community services
### Example of Creating my Support Network

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHAT HELP DO I NEED</th>
<th>WHO CAN HELP ME</th>
<th>HOW CAN THEY HELP ME</th>
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<tr>
<td>Talk to someone</td>
<td>My best friend</td>
<td>Over coffee or phone</td>
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<tr>
<td>Help with walking the dog</td>
<td>My neighbour’s daughter</td>
<td>I will pay her $10 a week</td>
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<tr>
<td>Respite: (a break from my caregiving role)</td>
<td>My mother-in-law</td>
<td>She will come over one Saturday per month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleaning</td>
<td>My other children</td>
<td>I will make a chore chart</td>
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Creating my Support Network

Complete this worksheet by thinking how you can strengthen your present relationships and make new connections. Answer the questions “what do you need?”, “who can help you?” and “what do you need to do to build relationships and social connections?”.

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<th>WHAT HELP DO I NEED?</th>
<th>WHO CAN HELP ME?</th>
<th>HOW CAN THEY HELP ME?</th>
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