

Taking Care of the Caregiver


haveTHAT talk



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. This can include family members and other individuals who provide unpaid support to a person in need. Roughly one-quarter of the Canadian population aged 15 and older (21%) reported being unpaid caregivers for care-dependent adult. Fifty-six percent of these caregivers reported feeling tired because of their responsibilities, and 44% felt worried or anxious in the last 12 months. Other things people experience when caring for someone include:

- Overwhelmed (37%)
- Disturbed sleep (30%)
- Short tempered or irritable (35% for women and 26% for men)
- Depressed (20% for women and 15% for men)
- Unable to work due to care responsibilities (5%)¹.

How to Take Care of Yourself, the Caregiver

Caregivers support the health and recovery of people living with health challenges. To effectively care for others, it is important to take care of your mental health and well-being even though it is not always easy to do. Some suggestions to help you find ways to care for yourself include:

- Acknowledging how you feel as a caregiver. It is normal to feel a range of complex feelings, such as guilt, anger, sadness, love and compassion.
- Talk to a friend or family for help and support.
- Choose self-care activities that are meaningful to you and make you feel better.
- Keep it simple so you can fit it into your daily routine.

Self-care can help you remain focused and balanced². It looks different for everyone and there is no “right way” to practice it.

Additional Resources

English

- [Mental Health, Addictions and Substance Use Health Services and Resources](#)
- [Mental Health Caregiver Guide: A Guide for Caregivers of Persons Living with Mental Illness](#)
- [The Ontario Caregiver Organization](#)

French:

- [Guide des proches aidants en santé mentale](#)
- [Organisme de soutien aux aidants naturels de l'Ontario](#)
- [Services et ressources de santé mentale, dépendances et de santé liée à la l'utilisation de substances](#)

¹ Statistics Canada. (2022). *More than half of women provide care to children and care-dependent adults in Canada, 2022*. Retrieved from: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/221108/dq221108b-eng.htm>

² Harvard Health Publishing. (2023). *Self-care for the caregiver*. Retrieved from: <https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/self-care-for-the-caregiver-2018101715003#:~:text=You%20may%20even%20feel%20guilty,for%2010%20minutes%20a%20day>

Activity 1: All Mixed-Up³

Goal

- Think about your feelings as a caregiver.

Messages

- Your caregiving experience is unique to your own situation.
- Caring for someone with mental health challenges can be rewarding and difficult.
- It is normal to have conflicting feelings.
- Your emotions are important, no matter what they may be. Your feelings can affect how you think and act, and how you care for yourself and loved ones.

Time

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

Supplies

- Video: [*“Caring for You, the Caregiver.”*](#)
- Flip chart paper, markers and pens.

Activity

- View the video: *“Caring for You, The Caregiver.”*
- Take some time to discuss the video with the participants. Ask them about Samira’s feelings and what they think about her situation.
- Break into small groups. Provide each group with flip chart paper and markers.
- Ask participants to discuss the different types of feelings they may have as caregivers.
- Remind participants that it is normal to have conflicting feelings. All feelings are important and valid. They are unique to each person.
- Ask groups to share what they have learned with the larger group if they feel comfortable.

Possible Answers

- | | |
|--|---------------|
| • Appreciation for life and health | • Love |
| • Feeling good | • Fear |
| • Feeling satisfaction | • Guilt |
| • Personal growth | • Frustration |
| • A stronger bond with the person you care for | • Anger |
| • Feeling connected to other caregivers | • Resentment. |
| • Anxiety | • Hurt |
| | • Loneliness |
| | • Grief |

³ 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

Activity 2: Finding Balance

Goal

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

Messages

- Plan to do something for yourself, each day, that you enjoy.
- Set realistic goals for yourself and the person you care for.
- There are times when you might have to say “no”. That is okay.

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 the *“Caregiver Bill of Rights”* for each participant.

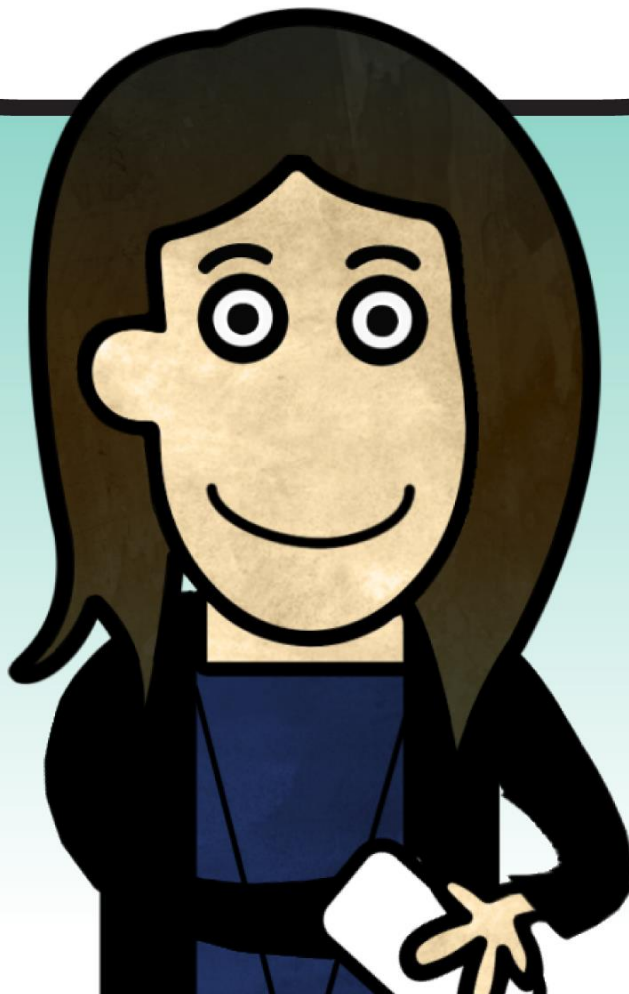
Activity

- View the video: *“Caring for You, The Caregiver.”*
- Ask participants to think about the strategies in the video that helped or could help Samira manage her role as a caregiver.
- Write answers on the flip chart paper.
- Tape “strategies Samira can use” and “self-care ideas” signs on the wall.
- Give each participant post-it notes and a pen.
- Ask each participant to write ideas that fall within these two categories on their post-it notes.
- Ask participants to post their ideas under either the “strategies” or “self-care ideas” wall signs.
- Review each post-it note with the larger group and ask participants about their thoughts and opinions as you do so.

Possible Answers

Suggestions for Samira:	Self-Care Activities
• Talk to her boss about flexible hours. • Talk to a counselor or support group. • Plan how many hours a week she needs to balance her life. • Ask her family and friends for help. • Ask for support from community service agencies. • Plan ahead for unexpected events.	• Go for coffee with friends. • Take a bubble bath. • Meditate or practice mindfulness in the morning before work. • Go for a walk with her partner. • Call a friend and chat or ask for help. • Read a favourite book. • Watch a comedy show/movie.

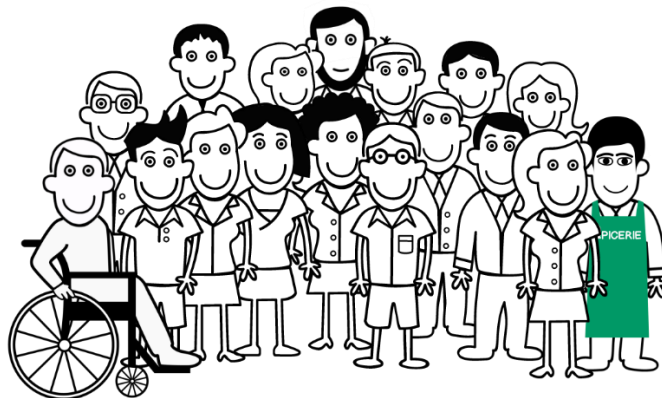
It is important to **plan** time so you
can **take care** of your own mental
physical health.



Caregiver's Bill of Rights⁴

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. I know my limits and do only what I can do.
4. Keep parts of my own life separate from my caregiver role. I have my own identity and my own life outside of caregiving.
5. Do some things just for myself.
6. Share and talk about the difficult feelings I experience, like feeling guilty, angry and frustrated.
7. Consideration, affection, forgiveness and acceptance by the person I care for.
8. Not be manipulated by others who use power, guilt or shame.
9. To be proud of the courage it has taken me to meet the needs of the person I care for.
10. 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.
11. Expect and advocate for improvements in resources to help and support caregivers.
12. Add my own statements of rights to this list, based on my own unique situation, feelings and experiences.



⁴ 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 3: 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 it is offered.

Time

- 20 to 30 minutes (depending on the size of the group).

Supplies

- Video: [*"Caring for You, the Caregiver."*](#)
- Flip chart paper and makers.

Activity

- View the video: *"Caring for You, the Caregiver."*
- Say to participants "It is important to be aware of your needs so you know who can help you and how they can help you."
- Ask participants "What comes to mind when you think of a support network?"
- 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?
- Give each participant a copy of the sample *"Creating My Support Network"* worksheet and a blank version.

Possible Answers

Suggestions for a support network:

- Informal supports such as family, neighbours or friends.
- Formal supports such as a doctor, social worker, counsellor, community service agencies, support workers.
- Unique supports such as 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 the [Resource Guide Greater Ottawa Area](#) and 211 to find community services

Sample Worksheet: Creating my Support Network

What help do I need?	Who can help me?	How can they help me?
Talk to someone	My best friend	Over coffee or phone
Help with walking the dog	My neighbour's daughter	I will pay her \$10 a week
Respite (a break from my caregiving role)	My mother-in-law	She will come over one Saturday per month
Cleaning	My other children	I will make a chore chart

Worksheet: Creating my Support Network

Complete this worksheet by thinking of ways you can strengthen your present relationships and make new connections. Answer the questions in the chart below.

What help do I need?	Who can help me?	How can they help me?