



Mental Health Caregiver Guide

A Guide for Caregivers of Persons Living with Mental Illness
or Experiencing Mental Health Challenges



Public Health
Santé publique



**Canadian Mental
Health Association**
Mental health for all

**Association canadienne
pour la santé mentale**
La santé mentale pour tous



MICA
Mental Illness
Caregivers Association
of Canada



CPHA • ACSP
CONFÉDÉRATION PUBLICITÉ SANTE AMÉRICAINES
ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE DE SANTÉ PUBLIQUE



MFS MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES
SFM SERVICES AUX MALADES
DES MALADIES MENTALES
A Division of C.J. Meakin & Partners
The Canadian Mental Health Association

Également disponible en français sous le titre:
Guide des proches aidants en santé mentale
Un guide pour les aidants des personnes vivant
avec une maladie mentale ou aux prises avec un
trouble de santé mentale

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PROJECT LEADS

This guide is a collaboration between Ottawa Public Health (OPH), the Canadian Public Health Association (CPHA), the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA), the Canadian Mental Health Association National, and the Mental Illness Caregivers Association (MICA).

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HELP RIGHT NOW

If you or the person you care for is in crisis and you need help right now, please:

- Call 911 (emergency) or your local emergency number
- Visit your local hospital's emergency department
- Contact a toll-free distress line in your province

We encourage you to seek out information on the mental health crisis and distress lines in your community – these are often available 24 hours a day / 7 days a week and have trained professionals that can help both you, the caregiver, and the person you care for with problem-solving, counselling, crisis support, and finding services.

PURPOSE OF THE MENTAL HEALTH CAREGIVER GUIDE

This guide was created out of a need identified by a caregiver of a person with a mental illness and the president of the *Mental Illness Caregivers Association (MICA)* and the president of the *Public Health (OPH)* to identify a gap in resources for caregivers experiencing mental health challenges across the lifespan. OPH and MICA, along with the *Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA)*, the *Canadian Public Health Association (CPHA)*, and *Family Services (MFS)* to develop a national resource for Canadian older adults facing these issues.

This guide is divided into two main sections: *Caring for YOU* and *Caring for the Person with a Mental Illness*, further divided into *Child, Youth, Adult, and Older Adult* sections across the lifespan and the responsibilities associated with caregiving.

We encourage you to focus on the sections that are most helpful to you, and to take time where you find yourselves on the journey to recovery.

This guide is intended to provide you, the caregiver, with helpful information to “build your own toolbox” using the various *Activities* in the guide to help you think about what you are learning in greater depth and to apply it to your own learning. Some information may seem simple or obvious, but it is based on things you *can* control, and things that you *can* do to support recovery, or while waiting for services.

The information in this guide is based on information from trustworthiness, psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers, caregivers, and individuals with lived experience. This guide will be helpful. We offer our strongest commitment and support for you.



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INTRODUCTION

The term “caregiver” includes all persons in a circle of care, including family members and other significant people who provide unpaid support to a person in need. In this guide they are referred to as “caregivers”.

The term “individual”, “person”, “person you care for” or “loved one” refers to the person (child, youth, adult, or older adult) living with mental illness being supported by the caregiver. In this guide they are referred to as a “person” or “individual”.

“Each person who steps up to the role of caregiver has to learn:

1. How to define the job such that it is one you CAN do;

2. How to do the job;

3. How to manage yourself such that you remain healthy and reliable.

For me, this was a process of discovery and development that took years.

There was no single place that I could turn to, so in many instances discovery took quite a while.”

- John, caregiver

Caring for a person with mental illness or experiencing mental health challenges can be a difficult yet rewarding journey. This journey begins with the onset of mental illness as changes in the individual’s behaviours, emotions, and thoughts are observed.

- Learning about the person’s diagnosis can spark many different emotions in both you and in the person you care for. These emotions are often a mix of positive and negative feelings such as pride in learning new skills and knowing your efforts are appreciated, to shame and guilt.
- Learning about the person’s particular illness and unique experience can help you as a caregiver to understand what is happening. It will also help you and the person you care for prepare for the journey to recovery.
- Being a caregiver means providing support for the individual and their unique journey by getting additional support, testing, diagnosis, care planning, treatment, recovery resources, and rehabilitation.

Each caregiver’s experience is unique; from the person they care for to their specific responsibilities, no two caregivers are the same. Some caregivers provide continuous support for a family member who lives in their home, while others may help someone with occasional periods of mental distress. Whether you are providing long-term support or short-term care, your role is important and valued.

It is important to note that a caregiver may be affected by the individual they are caring for. Just as the individual is going through a similar journey to that of the person they care for, some caregivers report that they also feel unwell (this can come from either side). On the other hand, when the individual is doing well, the caregiver is often able to feel better.

When thinking about your own mental health or the mental health of the person you care for, recognize that good mental health is about living well and feeling well. People living with mental illness can, and do, thrive just as people without a mental health condition.

The purpose of this guide is to help you care for yourself and your loved one while managing the responsibilities you have caring for someone else. You will find tools and resources to add to your existing “toolbox”. Use these tools to help support your journey.



CARING FOR YOU SELF-CARE FOR THE CAREGIVER

ABOUT THIS SECTION

You will note that the first half of this guide is focused on caring for you. That's right, YOU! Keeping yourself healthy both physically and emotionally will allow you to be the best caregiver you can be.

Caring for YOU is divided into smaller sections.

Each section is followed by an *Activity* – the purpose of these activities is to help you build skills to add to your toolbox. Some of these helpful tools and tips may seem obvious but they are often overlooked when caring for someone else. You can use these skills as you journey through recovery with the person you care for.

"I had never really paid attention to the pre-flight information before, but after caring for a loved one with mental illness this past year, all of a sudden it struck a chord with me. The pre-flight recording reminded all passengers to put on their own oxygen mask first, before helping someone else put on theirs. I started crying as I realized I hadn't taken care of myself at all in the past year, and if I was to truly be there and support my loved one, I needed to take better care of me."

- Louise, caregiver

TAKING CARE OF YOU

Taking care of a person living with mental illness or experiencing a mental health crisis can be rewarding and stressful. You will learn new skills and build a strong support system for, though this time may be demanding as you take on new responsibilities, but if not managed well, it can lead to your own health problems. One of the things the person they care for more than themselves and put themselves last. One thing to remember as a caregiver is to take care of YOU. Actions that promote your wellbeing are known as self-care.

Although being a caregiver entails advocacy for the individual, it also means to advocate for yourself and set boundaries. Just as in the pre-flight announcement, you put on your oxygen mask before helping another person put on theirs. Caregivers must take care of themselves before they can take care of someone else.

COMMON BARRIERS TO SELF-CARE INCLUDE:

Your own attitudes and beliefs:

"I'm being selfish if I sleep in late today."

Being afraid of what you need:

"I'm feeling over-worked, I need time off but can't take it."

Being afraid or not knowing where or how to ask for help:

"I don't want to bother them, they have their own lives to live."

Wanting to care and show your affections in a selfless way (compassion):

"He's my son, he's my priority."

It takes courage to reach out to people and time to build trust. Building a support network is a very important part of self-care and good mental health.

Try to create a network of understanding and positive people who value your unique situation and are sensitive to your needs as well as the individual's needs. Support can come from family, friends, neighbours, colleagues, faith communities, clubs or even strangers in a support group. This will help you feel less alone and feel supported and empowered.

TIPS FOR TAKING CARE OF YOU

- Set limits for yourself on what you can get done
- Say no if you need to: it is okay
- Ask for help: family, friends, even colleagues may want to help but may not know how to
- Delegate some of your responsibilities to others
- Take time to take care of yourself daily
- Prioritize your day
- Engage in activities you find relaxing (meditation, yoga, or a daily walk)
- Know your limits
- Learn how to recognize when you feel stressed
- Learn ways to cope with stress
- Talk to others who have been through what you are going through
- Share your feelings and thoughts with those close to you
- Maintain your other relationships
- Try not to rely on caffeine, alcohol and drugs to cope
- Focus on things you can control
- Set realistic goals for yourself and the person you care for
- Be prepared so that if you need more support you will know who to turn to

Activity: **BUILD YOUR OWN TOOLBOX** 

SKILL: Connecting
TOOL: Creating my support network

When thinking of a support network, what comes to mind?
Who and what do you need?
Who could help you with each need?

- Keep in mind the various supports around you including:
- ✓ informal supports (friends, neighbours, family)
 - ✓ formal supports (doctor, social worker, counsellor)
 - ✓ unique supports (support group, faith or spiritual group)

Looking at the table below, create a similar one for YOUR support network.

<i>What I need?</i>	<i>Who?</i>
To vent to someone	My best friend
Help with walking the dog	My neighbour's daughter
Respite	My mother-in-law
Cleaning	My other children

<i>What I need?</i>	<i>Who?</i>	<i>How?</i>

SELF-CARE; A CRUCIAL PART OF

Finding time for YOU when providing care for someone else can underestimate the toll that caregiving can take on their physical overload is an ongoing risk. Taking care of yourself and being mindful to prevent burn out.

Understanding the time commitment and the physical and emotional will help you identify the need to make self-care a part of your overall aspect of planning for self-care. Taking time every day to do some needs, will help you be better prepared to care for someone else.

Being a caregiver is a selfless job, focusing more on the needs of others than time in your day to stop and recognize the positives in your life - your job as a caregiver, and in yourself. Being mindful in your everyday means knowing how you are feeling both physically and mentally. Being positive and self-aware will help you stay healthy and realize when you need help.

Remember, as a caregiver you are not alone. There are many people who can help provide support and guidance. There are family members, health service providers that can provide you with information and help. You will find there are caregivers like you working hard to find ways to help your loved one and connecting with them will allow you to both share and support each other.

When you and the individual plan ahead, you will be better prepared. This includes knowing where to look for resources when you need them. The person you care for is healthy, so they can add their ideas to the plan.

“There will be days that you want to give up, but you wouldn't appreciate the good ones... sometimes when you need it.”
 - Susan, caregiver

Activity: **BUILD YOUR OWN TOOLBOX** 

SKILL: Making YOU a Priority
TOOL: Connecting with myself and with others

Think of making YOU a priority as a coping skill to add to your toolbox. Do something that’s just for you, focusing on you. This can be big or small: “I take time to read the paper in the morning by myself” or “I bought a plant for my office” or “I decided to re-connect with a friend”.

Think of building meaning outside of caregiving: “I’m buying new strings for my guitar and taking up playing again,” or “I take time to keep doing the activities I love”.

Don’t feel guilty or judge yourself if you feel you can’t do something just for YOU. If this activity seems out of reach, make it smaller. Savouring the moment “just for you” can be as simple as turning up your favourite song on the radio or singing in the shower.

Day	What did I do just for me today?
Monday	I had coffee with my sister today
Tuesday	I had a relaxing bath today
Wednesday	I went for a walk to explore nature today

Activity: **BUILD YOUR OWN TOOLBOX** 

Day	What did I do
Monday	
Tuesday	
Wednesday	
Thursday	
Friday	
Saturday	
Sunday	



CAREGIVER'S BILL OF RIGHTS

The following rights are reminders to take the time to take care of YOU. Read them when you need and add to them. Add rights that reflect your unique values, experiences and passions.

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.

Activity: **BUILD YOUR OWN TOOLBOX**

SKILL: Exploring my Values

TOOL: Reconnecting with my values and priorities

Identify an important value or priority in your life. Choose one that is important to you, that you care about, that you have a purpose, or helps guide you in your journey.

Define a goal that is related to this value/priority and outline steps to reach it. Here are a few values to get you started:

- | | |
|--|----------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Acceptance | <input type="checkbox"/> C |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Accessibility | <input type="checkbox"/> E |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Autonomy | <input type="checkbox"/> F |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Choice | <input type="checkbox"/> G |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Collaboration | <input type="checkbox"/> H |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Decision making | <input type="checkbox"/> I |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dignity | <input type="checkbox"/> J |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Diversity | <input type="checkbox"/> K |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Evidence-informed | <input type="checkbox"/> L |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Knowledge | <input type="checkbox"/> M |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fairness/equity | <input type="checkbox"/> N |

Value/Priority:
Respect

Goal:
Improve C

Steps Needed:

- Interrupt less
- Validate
- Listen more carefully
- Limit my judgements
- Take the Collaborative Problem Solving course

HURT: There may be days when you feel that no one appreciates what you are doing. For example, the individual may experience anger or frustration and may at times direct this towards you. It may be hard for you not to feel hurt or alone at these times.

ISOLATION: Sometimes you may not have the time to do things you like as often as you used to because of your caregiving responsibilities; this may lead to feeling all alone.

GRIEF AND SADNESS: Grieving is the process of adjusting to a loss. Grief can make you feel many emotions that are tough to understand. You could feel sad, angry, lonely, anxious and frustrated at the same time but also feel each of them separately at various times during the caregiving process.

POSITIVE FEELINGS ABOUT CAREGIVING

Caring for a person can be a wonderful and positive experience. It can be full of laughter and close moments. You may get a lot of satisfaction from being able to help the person you care for when they need you most.

The positive feelings you have about being a caregiver depend on your own situation.

PERSONAL GROWTH

You may feel that you are growing personally because you are learning skills, such as being more patient, that allow you to give the best care. At times, you may feel unsure how you or the person you care for will overcome a challenge – but you take things day by day or hour by hour and learn from it.

GREATER APPRECIATION FOR HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Caring for someone who is very ill can change the way you look at life and death. This may lead to a new understanding or deeper sense of the meaning of life; it may change what you see as important or change your personal goals.

STRENGTHENED RELATIONSHIPS

Often the caregiving role helps you become much closer, physically and emotionally, to the person you are caring for and this can make you feel more appreciated. You learn that through hope and courage come strength. This helps form a trusting attachment to the person you care for.

“I don’t need to fill the silence, all I need to do is be there.”

- Mariam, caregiver



SKILL: Personal Reflection

TOOL: Taking your emotional temperature

Taking your emotional temperature means reflecting on “where

REFLECTION:

What am I feeling emotionally?

Where am I feeling it in my body?

What helps me feel more positive?

What makes me feel more negative?

Looking at my day, what went well?

Looking at my day, what could have gone better?

What would help me right now?

REFLECTION:

What am I feeling emotionally?
Where am I feeling it in my body?
What helps me feel more positive?
What makes me feel more negative?
Looking at my day, what went well?
Looking at my day, what could have gone better?
What would help me right now?

RESILIENCY

Resiliency is a person's ability to cope well with adversity – your ups and downs. Life's ups and downs.

People who are resilient are healthier, live longer, have less depression, and are more successful in their personal and professional lives. Resiliency is a skill you can learn.

One of the key ways is to practice accurate and flexible thinking, and what you know and being able to go along with things as they change. Resiliency is an important first step to developing resiliency.

Resiliency is important for caregivers. Caregivers cannot be at their best when they are faced with a challenge resiliency helps you through it. The more resilient you are for resiliency; this is a great opportunity to show them how by using your own skills. There are four important areas of resiliency you can focus on as you work to become more resilient.

RELATIONSHIPS

- Supportive
- Positive
- Sharing and caring
- Helpful and offer problem-solving
- Fun.

EMOTIONAL SKILLS

- Calming yourself and self soothing
- Controlling your anger and frustration
- Reminding yourself that bad feelings will pass
- Avoiding decision-making when upset.

COMPETENCE (THINKING ABILITY)

- Trying to understand your problems before solving them
- Finding answers to help in your role of caregiving
- Controlling what you can
- Accepting the things you cannot control.

BEING HOPEFUL (OPTIMISM)

- Finding hope during hard times
- Finding ways to help ourselves
- Making the most out of the little positives
- Having a positive, supportive person in your network.

Activity: **BUILD YOUR OWN TOOLBOX**

SKILL: Checking In – Self-awareness
TOOL: How resilient am I?

Resiliency is the ability to “bounce back” from a difficult time or weather the storm.

Being able to check off “agree” to most of the boxes means you have the ability to build resiliency in your life. Do not feel frustrated if you have many “disagree” boxes. Build on your strengths and come back to the checklist in a few weeks. This shows you are starting to build resiliency.

<i>Resilience Quiz</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>
When life gets tough, I reach out to friends and family	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe that I can learn from difficult times	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When I am under stress, I still try to lead a normal life	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When life gets busy or stressful, I still take time for myself	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have a great support network	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
After a stressful event, I can let go and move forward	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I cope well with change	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I try to live in the moment and appreciate the good things in life	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Activity: **BUILD YOUR OWN TOOLBOX**

SCORING

Agree: If you answered Agree to 5 or more of the statements, you are a resilient person. The more Agrees, the more resilient you are and feel that even though you face challenges, you can keep your perspective.

Disagree: If you answered Disagree to 5 or more of the statements, you are not as resilient. The more Disagrees, the less resilient you are at this time. Build your resilience. See the next section Reflection for some ideas.

REFLECTION:
 When faced with a challenge, how will I recover from it?
 What helped me bounce back or get through a difficult time in the past?
 Can I think back to a time when I coped well with a tough time in the past?
 What tools and supports do I have in my life that can help build resilience?

A series of horizontal lines for writing reflections, partially obscured by a yellow sticky note graphic at the bottom left.

Activity: **BUILD YOUR OWN TOOLBOX**



REFLECTION:

When faced with a challenge, how will I recover from it?
What helped me bounce back or get through a difficult time in the past?
Can I think back to a time when I coped well with a tough time in my life?
What tools and supports do I have in my life that can help build resilience?

RECOGNIZING WHEN YOU NEED HELP

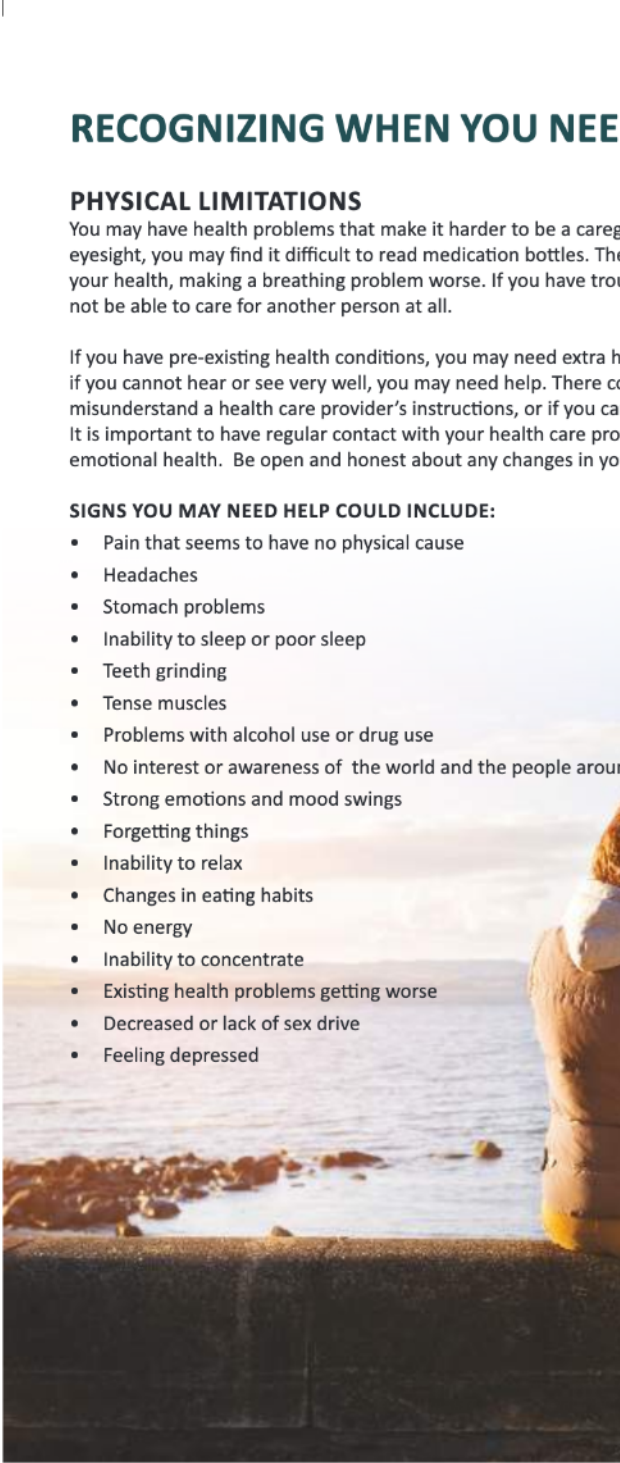
PHYSICAL LIMITATIONS

You may have health problems that make it harder to be a caregiver. For example, if you have poor eyesight, you may find it difficult to read medication bottles. If you have trouble with your hearing, your health, making a breathing problem worse. If you have trouble with your hands, you may not be able to care for another person at all.

If you have pre-existing health conditions, you may need extra help. For example, if you cannot hear or see very well, you may need help. There could be a misunderstanding of a health care provider's instructions, or if you cannot read, it is important to have regular contact with your health care provider. It is important to have regular contact with your health care provider to monitor your emotional health. Be open and honest about any changes in your health.

SIGNS YOU MAY NEED HELP COULD INCLUDE:

- Pain that seems to have no physical cause
- Headaches
- Stomach problems
- Inability to sleep or poor sleep
- Teeth grinding
- Tense muscles
- Problems with alcohol use or drug use
- No interest or awareness of the world and the people around you
- Strong emotions and mood swings
- Forgetting things
- Inability to relax
- Changes in eating habits
- No energy
- Inability to concentrate
- Existing health problems getting worse
- Decreased or lack of sex drive
- Feeling depressed



EMOTIONAL LIMITATIONS

The stress of your added responsibilities as a caregiver and the feelings that go along with it can be very difficult. It is possible to become so overwhelmed that you cannot give the best care. This does not mean that you are a bad caregiver. It just means that you have reached your limit. At this point it is important to ask for help.

HERE ARE SOME REASONS WHY CAREGIVERS DO NOT ASK FOR HELP:

- Feelings of guilt and shame
- Not knowing that others are in the same situation
- Lack of knowledge about available options/resources
- Not being able to pay for formal caregiving services
- Not enough time to find help
- Cultural beliefs that discourage help from outside the family
- Lack of services to meet your needs
- Feelings of depression, which can reduce the motivation needed to find help
- Not being able to talk about feelings.

It is always okay to ask for help. Asking for help is part of providing the best care possible. Many caregivers share this advice:

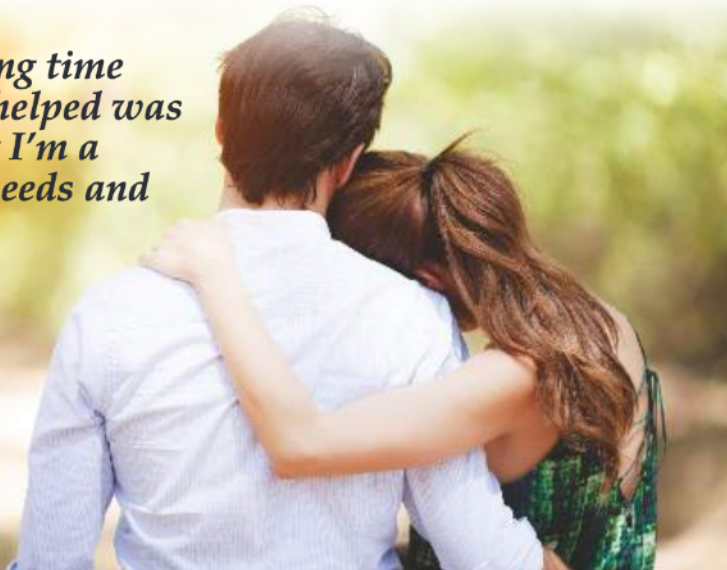
“Do not be afraid to ask for the help you need!”

You should feel proud of what you are able to do and realize that you have a right to continue to maintain good physical and mental health, and to take time to do things other than caregiving that make life meaningful life for you.

If you notice a big change in your mental or physical health, speak to your health care provider about it as soon as you can. Several distress lines offer support to caregivers, do not hesitate to reach out.

“I feel guilty taking time for myself, what helped was remembering that I’m a person too with needs and with limits.”

- Pierre, caregiver



Activity: **BUILD YOUR OWN TOOLBOX** 

SKILL: Mindful Breathing

TOOL: Helping to control emotions

MINDFUL BREATHING

1. Get settled and comfortable. It’s best if you sit with your back straight.
2. Breathe in and out comfortably. As you breathe in, mentally count “two”. Go all the way up to 10, and back down again. Stop back as soon as you notice. Don’t criticize yourself.
3. If you totally lose track, just start again from the first step. E
4. Record your experiences below. What did you notice about what you did you notice?

Mindful Breathing		
Day	Done?	
Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		
Saturday		
Sunday		

WHAT TYPE OF HELP DO YOU NEED?

Figuring out what type of help you need is very important. Explain your situation to family, friends, colleagues, and community members so that they are able to understand your situation and support you. Give them regular updates and try to include them in any decisions you want to make.

You may need help to take some time for yourself – maybe even a short vacation. Ask a family member or friend to take your place and be there if the person you care for needs support during your time away. Think about what you can and cannot do on a regular basis. Then think about how often you need help. Is it every day, once a week or in the evenings? Make a list of people who have agreed to help out when you need a break.

FAMILY, FRIENDS AND NEIGHBOURS:

The people closest to you and your situation may be a source of help that will not cost money. Ask them for help and be specific. When many people are helping, each person might only need to offer a small amount of time.

Even though meetings and discussions with family and friends are helpful, make sure to respect everyone's opinions and limits.

PEOPLE CAN HELP BY:

- Walking the dog
- Preparing meals in advance
- Running errands
- Helping you take care of your own household and family
- Taking the individual to appointments or facilitating transport
- Providing friendship and support to you, the caregiver.

A neighbour may be able to help with shovelling snow or mowing the lawn or can be on standby for the individual in case of an emergency. Even family or friends who live far away can help by offering friendship and support over telephone, mail, or email communication.

When asking for help, think about the skills and strengths people around you have and take advantage of these by asking them to help you with something they are familiar with or feel confident taking on. At times you may have to teach someone how to best help too.

SUPPORT GROUPS:

People who are dealing with similar caregiving challenges may find a support group share their feelings and talk about what they are experiencing in their environment. You can find out about community resources, get advice on how to manage your situation by being with people who understand what you are going through, and find support groups for caregivers as well as ones that focus on a specific illness.

MAKE SURE THE SUPPORT GROUP IS RIGHT FOR YOU BY ASKING:

- Does it make you feel welcome and safe?
- Is everything you share kept confidential?
- Is the environment respectful?
- Are meeting times and places good for you?
- Are experienced health care providers involved?
- Does the group invite experts to speak?

Reach out to your community, including faith, spiritual and cultural groups, to find a support network you can join. You can also get help from a professional counsellor to manage anger and other feelings.

To find out more information about support groups in your area, contact your health care provider. You can contact groups focused on a particular type of illness. You can also look at local community listings to find other sources of support, such as Home Health Care Services, Supplies, Charitable and Non-Profit Organizations.

Your province or territory may have an association for caregivers. Visit the website on your Ministry of Health's website, or on the Health Canada website.

MEDICAL HELP:

Sometimes no matter what you do, you still feel stressed or sad. It is very important that you speak to your health care provider as soon as you can about the care of YOU first.

You can also reach out to a service such as the Canadian Mental Health Association for additional support with caregiving responsibilities. Click here to learn more. Other great resources for support can include health-information services (in your territory), and medical walk-in clinics (including mental health walk-in clinics). Check listings or online for one in your area.

TIPS:

- Learn to recognize when you need to ask for help
- Do not feel guilty or if you need to ask for help
- Work with other family members, including your loved one, to share responsibilities
- Congratulate yourself regularly for all you have been able to do

Activity: **BUILD YOUR OWN TOOLBOX** 

SKILL: Getting the Help I Need
TOOL: Creating a plan

Create a checklist of possible supports – people who you could include in your support network to help you and the person you care for. Think about how you could reach out and why this would be helpful.

The more complete the table, the more options and supports you will have when you need them.

Who?	For what?	How?
Family doctor	Letter to be excused from work	Call doctor's office to schedule an appointment

Who?	For what?	How?

Who?	For what?	How?

Who?	For what?	How?

Who?	For what?	How?

Who?	For what?	How?

Who?	For what?	How?

WHAT IS CAREGIVER BURNOUT

Being resilient when faced with the stress associated with caregiving, no matter what your coping style, too many responsibilities and too much time. Burnout means that you cannot keep giving the best care to the person you care for emotionally and/or physically. It means it's time to check in and take care of yourself.

HERE ARE SOME QUESTIONS TO HELP YOU SEE IF YOU ARE AT RISK FOR CAREGIVER BURNOUT

- Do you feel like you are being pulled in different directions?
- Do you feel like you are trapped in your role as a caregiver?
- Is there a problem between you and the people you are close to or between the people you are close to and the one you care for?
- Do you feel that you are not getting help from other people?
- Is the person you care for demanding and expecting too much?
- Do you feel like you cannot do everything that your loved one needs?
- Do you have a hard time talking to others around you?
- Is your health or the health of the one you care for getting worse?
- Do you feel like there is too much to do?

If you said yes to any of the questions above, you may be at risk for caregiver burnout. Take care of yourself and make your health a priority. Speak to a health care provider, nurse practitioner or mental health provider as they know you and your situation. If you are currently working, you may also have Employee Assistance Programs. Contact your human resources department for more information. Lastly, professional health counselling services might be helpful. These can be found in your community.



Activity: **BUILD YOUR OWN TOOLBOX** 

SKILL: Preventing Burnout
TOOL: Creating a plan

It's very important to create a plan before burnout happens. Hopefully, you will never have to use this plan, but if you do, it will be helpful to have it already completed so that you can refer to it and follow the steps you identified.

Consider this:

- 1) Who will be in the plan? Your health care provider, peer support groups, mental health agencies, friends and family.
- 2) For what tasks? For your own physical or mental health. For peer support. For comfort.
- 3) How? What are the steps needed to reach the "who" and "what"?
- 4) Which activities will help? List all that come to mind.

List as many people and services as possible, using the *Resource Guide – Greater Ottawa* or the *Toolbox for Identifying Resources in Your Region* adapted to your area and fill in the table.

Add your personal activities that help, such as spending time with friends and family and anything else you enjoy and that helps you get through hard times. For some, going to see a movie, a comedy show or a play may be very helpful, while going for a walk or spending time alone may be helpful for others. The more you have listed in the table, the more helpful it will be at times when you are feeling overwhelmed.

Who?	For what?	How?	Activities that can help prevent burnout?
Family doctor	Letter to be excused from work	Call doctor's office to schedule an appointment	- Walking the dog - Going to yoga - Getting enough sleep

Activity: **BUILD YOUR OWN TOOLBOX** 

Who?	For what?	How?



CARING FOR THE INDIVIDUAL

ABOUT THIS SECTION

INTRODUCTION TO THE STAYING *S-T-R-O-N-G* STRATEGY

A Staying STRONG approach will reduce vulnerability and increase resiliency for both the caregiver and the person they care for. Healthy habits are an important part of managing mood, anxiety, depression, anger, irritability, and other aspects of mental health. The Staying STRONG strategy is adapted from Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT) and informed by public health. Don't worry if this doesn't sound familiar.

What's important is that the Staying STRONG strategy focuses on skills that are within reach and easy to put into action. These skills are intended to give the caregiver and the individual control over the things that they can control and empower them, especially in instances where an individual is waiting for services and feels powerless.

The Staying STRONG skills focus on a holistic approach and challenge caregivers and individuals to focus on very important factors that contribute to good mental health. These skills can be used in many different areas that foster mental health.

CAREGIVER RESPONSIBILITIES

It may feel like you have a long list of responsibilities as a caregiver, but you do not have to do it alone. Asking for help is always OK. When caring for a person of any age, open and clear communication is essential. Speaking calmly and being aware of your body language will help to avoid conflict and build trust and comfort between you.

You can build strong trust and communication between you and the person you care for by including them in planning their care. This allows them to practice decision-making and problem-solving, which helps them feel more independent and confident. Maintain good, open communication so that the individual feels comfortable sharing their concerns with you. As their needs change or when they have questions about their care they will feel they can come to you with them. When they approach you it is important to be patient and listen carefully. Working together through this experience will help build a partnership and ensure that the person receives the care they need.

Having regular communication with others who are directly involved in the individual's care plan is also necessary to make sure that the individual gets what they need. For example, talking with teachers of children and youth with mental illness about new concerns can help make sure that they are properly cared for in the various aspects of their lives. Keep open communication with other family members so that they know how they can help you in your caregiver role.

Try to share some of your caregiver responsibilities. Setting realistic expectations of how much you can do is important in preventing emotional overload or burnout. It is easy to find yourself taking on more than you can maintain. At any point during your role as a caregiver (ideally when you first take on this role), write down what is expected of you. It's easy to take on a little extra here and there, which can add up to something you cannot maintain.

When planning care you will need to think of the person's mental, physical and home safety needs, among other things. The next section will help you in this planning process.

STAYING STRONG: CHILDREN

As a caregiver, Staying Strong may not always feel possible. But the points below, you are giving yourself and the child you are caring for a chance to be resilient. Check off as many of the six steps below that you can do now. If you cannot do right now. Try each day to get closer to achieving them.

HOW CAREGIVERS CAN STAY STRONG

SLEEP

- Follow a routine
- Make sleep hygiene important

TAKE CARE OF YOUR HEALTH

- In order to care for someone else you have to stay healthy
- Know your limits
- Practice self-care

RELATIONSHIPS

- Think of your relationship with the child you care for: what is working well? What could be improved?

OWN IT

- Once a day do something that makes you feel in control of your life;
- Something that's just for you;

NUTRITION

- Eat a balanced diet, not too much, not too little, food gives you energy: don't run on empty
- Model good behaviour for the child you care for and educate them about healthy eating and food choices

GET MOVING

- Ensure that you maintain leisure and activity
- Incorporate physical activity such as an evening or morning walk into your everyday life

HOW CHILDREN CAN STAY STRONG

- SLEEP**
- Have child keep a bedtime routine
 - Limit technology-use before bed
 - Make sleep hygiene important
 - Help them maintain a good balance between rest and activities
- TAKING MEDICATIONS**
- CHILDREN CANNOT TAKE MEDICATIONS ON THEIR OWN
- Give medication as prescribed
 - Monitor how well medication is working and any side effects – report these to health care provider
- RELATIONSHIPS**
- Help the child maintain positive and supportive relationships
 - Gain support from child care providers or school officials so that the child is constantly surrounded by a trusting adult they can confide in
 - Teach the child how to communicate what they are feeling
 - Maintain the warmth in your relationship with the child
 - Make times for snuggles and cuddling
- OWN IT**
- Once a day have the child do something that they feel confident doing
 - This provides a sense of mastery and will make them feel positive and increase their self-esteem
 - Put a sticker on a calendar for each day they do this
- NUTRITION**
- Have the child eat a balanced diet made of healthy and nutrient-dense foods;
 - Not too much, not too little: food is fuel
 - Don't have the child run on empty
- GET MOVING**
- Engage the child in activities outside in nature
 - Encourage walking, exercise, extra-curricular activities, and sports

CAREGIVER RESPONSIBILITIES

Below is a listing of the major caregiver responsibilities for a child with mental health challenges. Depending on where you're at in the list, but focusing in on these key responsibilities will help you feel supported on their road to wellness and recovery.



- attachment
 - validation
 - emotional support
 - being present
 - effective communication
 - understanding and support of developmental ages and stages
 - educating others (including family members, school officials, child care providers) about the child's story and mental health issues
 - seeking out community resources
 - providing coordination of care (including making and accompanying to appointments)
 - supporting the child with school readiness, school attendance, and performance
 - providing emotional support with separations and transitions
- ensuring child is:
 - well fed
 - bathed
 - dressed
 - groomed appropriately (encouraging independence where possible)
 - monitoring symptoms
 - monitoring effectiveness and side effects of treatment plan and medications
 - encouraging child to get involved in leisure activities, hobbies, clubs, or sports
 - promote play and fun

STAYING STRONG: YOUTH

As a caregiver, Staying Strong may not always feel possible. By following as many of the Staying Strong points below as you can, you are giving yourself and the youth you care for the greatest chance to be healthy and resilient. Check off as many of the six steps below that you can do today. Don't be frustrated about the ones you cannot do right now. Try each day to get closer to achieving that step.

HOW CAREGIVERS CAN STAY STRONG

- SLEEP**
- Keep a routine
 - Make sleep hygiene important
 - Limit technology-use
 - Have a good balance between rest and activities
 - Model good behaviour for the youth you care for

- TAKE CARE OF YOUR HEALTH**
- In order to care for someone else you have to stay healthy
 - Know your limits
 - Practice self-care
 - Do not push yourself until you are so ill that you can no longer care for someone else
 - Have a back-up caregiver in mind in case you become sick and need time off

- RELATIONSHIPS**
- Think of your relationship with the youth you care for:
 - What is working well?
 - What could be improved?
 - How are you maintaining validation and attachment in your relationship?
 - Does anxiety or fear get in the way of you being the caregiver you want to be?

- OWN IT**
- Once a day do something that makes you feel in control of your life;
 - Something that's for you;
 - That you're good at, that's positive;
 - This will give you a sense of mastery and accomplishment.

- NUTRITION**
- Eat a balanced diet;
 - Not too much, not too little;
 - Food is fuel -- don't run on empty.
 - Model good behaviour for the youth you care for and educate them about healthy eating and food choices
 - Try to make eating together a regular activity and make groceries and meal preparation an activity you do together

- GET MOVING**
- Make sure that you maintain leisure and activity
 - Incorporate physical activity into everyday life
 - Try something like morning or evening walks, get involved with social activities and organized sports

HOW YOUTH CAN STAY STRONG

- SLEEP**
- Help the youth adopt a bedtime routine
 - Encourage sleep hygiene, educate the youth about the importance of maintaining a good balance between rest and activity

- TAKING MEDICATIONS**
- Ensure that the youth is taking medication as prescribed;
 - Have them tell their doctor how it's working for them;
 - Make sure they know their rights;

- RESIST**
- Help the youth resist urges
 - Avoid negative behaviours

- OWN IT**
- Once a day encourage the youth to do something that makes them feel in control of their life

- NUTRITION**
- Encourage the youth to eat a balanced diet;
 - Not too much, not too little;

- GET MOVING**
- Ensure that the youth maintains leisure and activity
 - Encourage them to incorporate physical activity into their everyday life by getting outdoors and walking to their destinations

CAREGIVER RESPONSIBILITIES – YOUTH

Below is a listing of the major caregiver responsibilities for a youth living with mental illness or experiencing mental health challenges. Depending on where you're at in the caregiver journey, this may feel like a long list, but by focusing in on these key responsibilities it will help you provide the best care, and will help the individual feel supported on their road to wellness and recovery.



- Mental Health Needs**
- validation
 - emotional support
 - effective communication
 - attachment
 - encouraging independence and self-advocacy
 - help with decision-making
 - managing problematic behaviours/situations (including crises, hospital admission)
 - encouragement and motivation
 - providing education around diagnosis and medications
 - educating others (including family members and school officials) about mental illness and the youth's story
 - providing guidance around community resources
 - seeking out community supports
 - advocating for care
 - navigating resources
 - providing coordination of care (including making and accompanying youth to appointments)

- Physical and Social Needs**
- ensuring that the youth is able to complete activities of daily living
 - ensuring that the youth is performing daily activities related to self-care (feeding themselves, bathing, dressing, grooming)
 - attending school
 - working or volunteering
 - extracurricular activities
 - leisure
 - monitoring symptoms
 - monitoring effectiveness and side effects of treatment plan and medications (if applicable)

- Home Safety**
- creating and maintaining a safe home environment
 - medication safety
 - respite care
 - safety implications of leaving the youth alone
 - supervision needs

- Other Needs**
- providing housing
 - facilitating transportation
 - financial support
 - providing groceries
 - meal planning and preparation
 - sexual health (talking about safer sex and contraception; directing youth to appropriate professionals for more information if necessary)

STAYING STRONG: ADULTS

As a caregiver, Staying Strong may not always feel possible. But if you do the points below as possible, you are giving yourself and the adult you care for a healthy and resilient. Check off as many of the six steps below that you can do about the ones you cannot do right now. Try each day to get closer to all six.

HOW CAREGIVERS CAN STAY STRONG

- SLEEP**
- Keep a routine, make sleep hygiene important
 - Have a good balance between rest and activities

- TAKE CARE OF YOUR HEALTH**
- In order to care for someone else you have to stay healthy
 - Know your limits - practice self-care

- RELATIONSHIPS**
- Think of your relationship with the adult you care for:
 - What is working well?
 - What could be improved?

- OWN IT**
- Once a day do something that makes you feel in control of your life:
 - Something that's for you;

- NUTRITION**
- Eat a balanced diet:
 - Not too much, not too little;
 - Food is fuel – don't run on empty.
 - Model good behaviour for the adult you care for

- GET MOVING**
- Try to make time for leisure and daily activity
 - Incorporate physical activity in everyday life

HOW ADULTS CAN STAY STRONG

SLEEP

- Help the adult adopt a bedtime routine
- Make sleep hygiene important
- Educate them on the importance of having a good balance between rest and activities
- Rest is important to recovery

TAKING MEDICATIONS

- Remind the adult to take medication as prescribed
- Have them tell their doctor how it's working for them
- Ensure that the adult knows their rights, and:
- Monitor and report side effects, and are mindful of the effects of drugs and alcohol on medications – have them talk to their doctor or someone they trust.

RESIST

- Help the adult resist urges
- Avoid negative behaviours, drugs, and alcohol

OWN IT

- Once a day encourage the adult to do something that makes them feel in control of their life;
- Something that's for them, that they're good at that's positive – this will give them a sense of mastery and accomplishment

NUTRITION

- Encourage the adult to eat a balanced diet
- Not too much, not too little;
- Food is fuel - don't run on empty.

GET MOVING

- Ensure the adult maintains leisure and activity
- Encourage them to incorporate physical activity into their everyday life by getting outdoors and walking to their destinations
- Encourage them to get involved with social activities, groups or organized sports

CAREGIVER RESPONSIBILITIES

Below is a listing of the major caregiver responsibilities for an adult with mental health challenges. Depending on where you're at in the list, but by focusing in on these key responsibilities it will help you and the individual feel supported on their road to wellness and recovery.



- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • companionship • validation • emotional support • encouraging independence and motivation • managing problematic behaviours and situations (including crises, hospital admission) • providing education on diagnosis and medications • educating others about mental illness and the individual's story • providing guidance around community resources • seeking out community resources • advocating for care • navigating resources • providing coordination of care (including appointments) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensuring that the individual is able to complete activities of daily living • ensuring that the individual is able to complete any daily activity related to self-care (feeding themselves, bathing, dressing, grooming) • working or volunteering • homemaking • leisure • monitoring symptoms of mental health issues • monitoring effectiveness and side effects of the treatment plan and medications (if applicable) • helping with groceries • meal planning and preparation • food safety |
|--|---|

STAYING STRONG: OLDER ADULTS

As a caregiver, Staying Strong may not always feel possible. But by following as many of the Staying Strong points below, you are giving yourself and the older adult you care for the greatest chance to be healthy and resilient. Check off as many of the six steps below that you can do today. Don't be frustrated by the ones you cannot do. Try each day to get closer to achieving that step.

HOW CAREGIVERS CAN STAY STRONG

- SLEEP**
- Keep a routine
 - Make sleep hygiene important
 - Have a good balance between rest and activities
 - Model good behaviour for the older adult you care for

- TAKING CARE OF YOUR HEALTH**
- In order to care for someone else you have to stay healthy
 - Know your limits
 - Practice self-care
 - Do not push yourself until you are so ill that you can no longer care for someone else
 - Have a back-up caregiver in mind in case you become ill and need time off

- RELATIONSHIPS**
- Think of your relationship with the older adult you care for, what is working well?
 - What could be improved?
 - How are you maintaining validation and attachment in your relationship?
 - Does anxiety or fear get in the way of you being the caregiver you want to be?

- OWN IT**
- Once a day do something that makes you feel in control of your life:
 - Something that's for you;
 - That you're good at, that's positive;
 - This will give you a sense of mastery and accomplishment.

- NUTRITION**
- Eat a balanced diet, not too much, not too little, food is fuel; don't run on empty,
 - Model good behaviour for the person you care for
 - Try to make eating together a regular activity
 - Use grocery shopping, meal preparation, and cooking as an activity and opportunity to connect

- GET MOVING**
- Ensure that you maintain leisure and activity
 - Incorporate physical activity into everyday life like morning or evening walks
 - Get involved with social activities and organized sports

HOW OLDER ADULTS CAN STAY STRONG

- SLEEP**
- Help the older adult adopt a bedtime routine
 - Make sleep hygiene important

- TAKING MEDICATIONS**
- Remind the older adult to take medication as prescribed
 - Have them tell their doctor how it's working for them
 - Ensure that they know their rights:

- RELATIONSHIPS**
- Help the older adult find comfort in companionship
 - Tell them to let others know that they need company
 - Help them get involved in their community

- OWN IT**
- Once a day encourage the older adult to do something that makes them feel in control of their life:
 - Something that's for them;

- NUTRITION**
- Encourage the older adult to eat a balanced diet
 - As their appetite decreases it's important that they eat nutrient-dense foods

- GET MOVING**
- Encourage walking;
 - Stretching;
 - Range of motion exercises;

CAREGIVER RESPONSIBILITIES – OLDER ADULT

Below is a listing of the major caregiver responsibilities for an older adult living with mental illness or experiencing mental health challenges. Depending on where you're at in the caregiver journey, this may feel like a long list, but focusing in on these key responsibilities will help you provide the best care and will help the individual feel supported on their road to wellness and recovery.



Mental Health Needs	Physical and Social Needs	Home Safety	Other Needs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • companionship • validation • emotional support • managing problematic behaviours/situations (including crises, hospital admission) • encouragement and motivation • providing education on diagnosis and medications • educating others about mental illness and individual's story • providing guidance around community resources • seeking out community resources • advocating for care • navigating resources • providing coordination of care (including appointments) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensuring that the individual is able to complete activities of daily living (can include bathing, hygiene, dressing, mouth care, dental care, foot care, toileting, transferring, walking, turning in bed, pain support) • buying groceries • food safety • meal planning and preparation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • creating and maintaining a safe home environment • fall prevention • medication safety • respite care • implications of leaving an older adult alone • evaluating falling risk • supervision and safety needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • housing • transportation • banking • financial planning • bill payments • power of attorney/legal • planning for the future • understanding mental health needs in the context of aging • understanding the normal aging process • ensuring that the medical provider is involved • link with the pharmacist to coordinate medications • sexual health

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS:
In certain cases, an older adult may have a physical illness that influences their mental health – take extra time to talk to the person's care providers to learn more.

CONCLUSION

We hope this guide provided you with helpful tips and information, supports, resources, and coping tools. We encourage you to continue to build on these. We also encourage you to Stay Strong the same.

Remember that some of this information may seem simple, or obvious. The information in this guide is based on things you can control, and your treatment plan, promote recovery, or while waiting for services.

Caring for a person with mental illness or someone experiencing mental health challenges, we hope that this guide has challenged you to think about using your tools to advocate for not only yourself, as a caregiver, but also for the individual. As you support the individual throughout their journey to recovery, you are also supporting your own emotional and physical wellbeing. As a caregiver, you are also practicing self-care. Taking care of YOU!

Remember that you are not alone. Others are going through this journey. Find your network, find peers, and remember to stay strong.

"I'm so thankful to have you by my side on this journey. With you, I feel I can conquer the world. Together, we'll stay strong and resilient. It may get hectic and stressful, but with you, I know I can do it. I caring for you, we'll make it through."
- The Individual in a



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