

CAREGIVER

Mental & Emotional Health



COMMUNITY FOR
CAREGIVERS

WELCOME

Hello and welcome to this course on Caregiver Mental & Emotional Health. We are so excited that you are part of the Community for Caregivers and hope you find strength and support here!

This workbook provides you with all of the tools and activities we cover in this course. It also gives you space to write your thoughts and action plans as we go through each section.

Please save a blank copy of this workbook so you always have it for reference. As your situation changes, you may find yourself wanting to revisit the principles taught in the course.

Go ahead and PRINT this now so you can begin writing. Let's get started!



INTRODUCTION

As a caregiver, you are providing a noble and benevolent service worthy of so much praise and admiration. Being a caregiver can be extraordinarily rewarding and a personally powerful experience, but it can also create an overwhelming and stressful situation.

You are likely at some point or another to feel physically drained, emotionally uncertain, socially isolated, or financially strained during that journey. This course is designed to help you be aware of your own needs and how to maintain personal health, wellness, and resilience while serving in the important duty as a caregiver.



My name is Matt—and this course has grown out of my personal story and really the stories and experiences of so many others.

I grew up with my grandparents in a small Idaho town. I lost my mom just after childbirth, so I never knew her—and my dad went in a different direction. I called my grandma and my grandpa mom and dad—because they were, and they were amazing. I became a caregiver in my teens. My dad—my grandpa—passed away when I was 23, and I served as a primary caregiver for my mom for the next 12 years. Watch my video in the course to learn more about my journey and what I learned in those rewarding, but tough years of my life.

1 in 5 Americans is a caregiver, that's 53 million caregivers just in the United States

On average, caregivers of adults provide care for 4.5 years, with 29% of caregivers providing care for 5 years or longer

2020 AARP Caregiving Report - US

TAKING CARE OF YOU

We need to strengthen, nourish, and care for the caregiver. For most of you participating in this course—that means strengthening, nourishing, and helping YOU. You need to take care of you.

So many caregivers just don't think about this—and it's for a variety of reasons. One reason, they're caregivers—so they're selfless—and it feels just plain wrong to put themselves at the top of their to do list. Another reason, their personal situation doesn't feel urgent. So, while their many caregiving responsibilities do feel urgent, their personal things just don't. Or, a very common explanation we get is that caregivers are busy juggling a hundred things and to stop the madness and calm the chaos of what's on their plate, they can put their own needs on the back burner, or the side burner.

The problem with this approach is that, if you neglect yourself, you slip into a black hole that not only causes you problems down the line, it can also hijack the care you want to give to your loved one. This is a common situation.

3 out of 4 caregivers report providing care to be stressful, and more than half of those found it to be overwhelming

1 in 4 caregivers report having difficulty taking care of their own health. About 85% of family caregivers in the U.S. do not have any respite care.

2020 AARP Caregiving Report - US

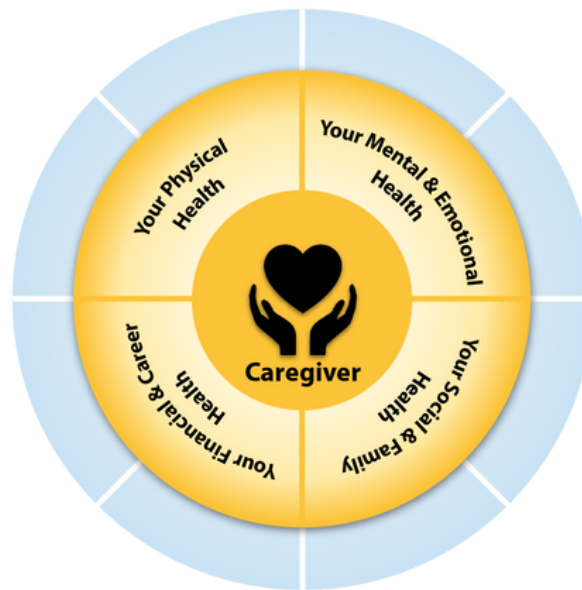
Respite care is care that relieves the caregiver from their duties so they can get rest, recharge, revitalize their focus on their lives. In addition, depression affects 20 to 40% of caregivers. And burnout—which comes in many forms, is very commonly reported.

TAKING CARE OF YOU

Stephen Covey, author of the “7 Habits of Highly Effective People,” taught as the 7th habit, “Sharpen the Saw” which means taking care of you.

The first thing on the top of the list has to be keeping you, yourself, healthy, well and resilient.

What does a healthy, well and resilient caregiver look like? We’ve identified four elements in the wheel below.



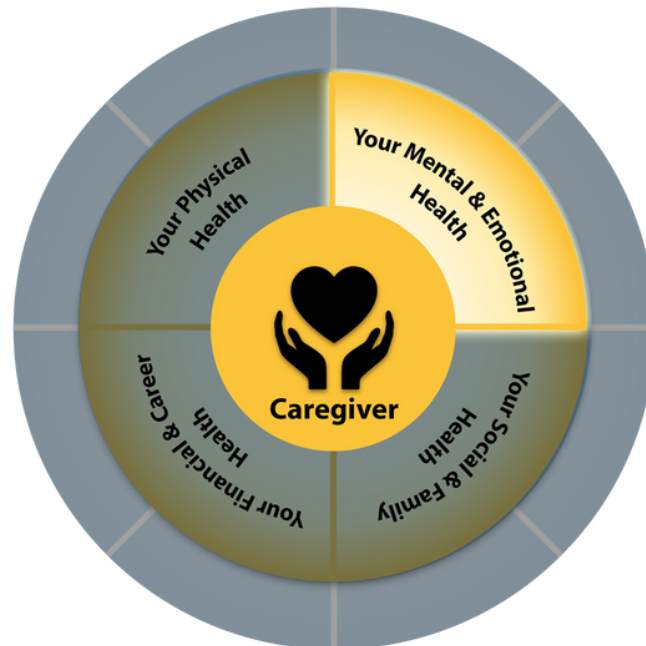
All of those different areas of health have to be strong for you to be able to give the very best of yourself to the caregiving situation.

We cover all of these in our Caregiver Health, Wellness, and Resilience Masterclass.

For now, we will focus this course on your Mental & Emotional Health.

MENTAL & EMOTIONAL HEALTH

Challenges / Stigma, Mindfulness, and Stress



We KNOW that there is a strong relationship between your caregiving and your mental and emotional health.

This course explores ideas to help you understand what we are really talking about when we say Mental and Emotional health. It covers mental and emotional issues, but it also includes our psychological health and our spiritual health. It's the part of us that manifests in thoughts, feelings, moods, attitudes and more.

We'll cover:

- How to understand the challenges and let go of stigma
- The practice of Mindfulness and how it can bring peace to your caregiving responsibilities
- Managing your stress and discovering the areas where you need additional help

CHALLENGES AND STIGMA

Feelings of stress, burden, anxiety, anger, bitterness, guilt, depression, and overwhelm are common to caregivers.

You are not alone if you have felt—or are currently experiencing—one or more of these mental health challenges.

We have to overcome the stigma of getting help for our mental health. Could you use help with any of these mental and emotional challenges? Is there something stopping you from getting that help?

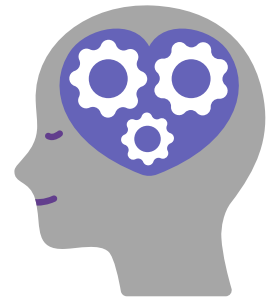
MINDFULNESS FOR CAREGIVERS

Mindfulness is an incredibly effective practice to help caregivers reduce stress and anxiety.

Complete the Mindfulness Activities

"Grounding Practice" - Insights from a Mindfulness Coach

"Nourishing the Caregiver" - Mindfulness Practice



Before I tried the activities I felt:

During the activities I felt:

After the activities I felt:

MANAGING STRESS AND EMOTIONS

Note: This reflection activity is based on current research and therapeutic practices, but is not meant to replace the care or advice given from medical professionals. This stress thermometer scale is to be used as a tool, the word descriptions may not reflect your range of emotions and you may not experience these emotions in the sequence shown below.

This reflection activity is a tool to help you:

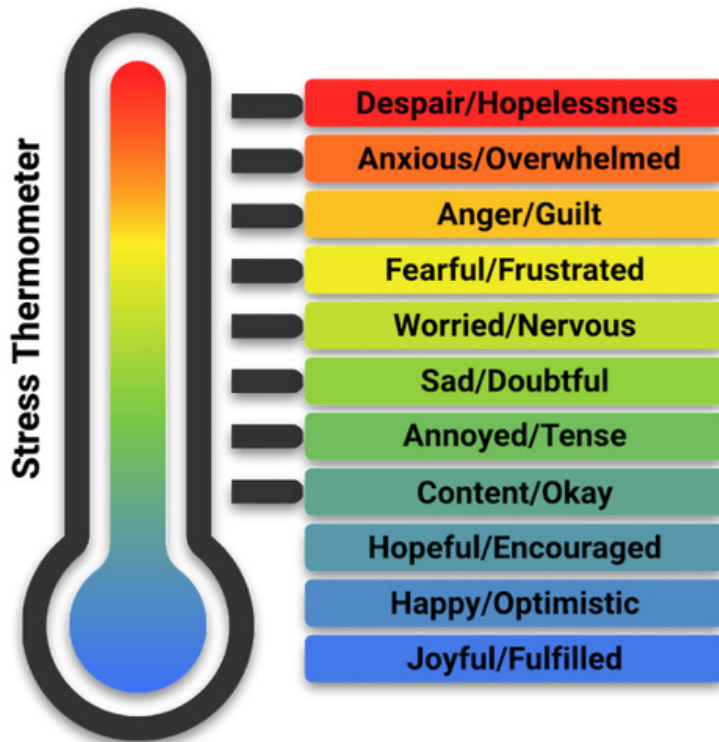


1. Identify and label your stress levels
2. Observe where you feel stress in your body
3. Discover the triggers that activate or increase your stress
4. Recognize aspects of stress that you can control
5. Create a meaningful action plan to prevent and lower stress

The Stress Thermometer

1. Become Self-Aware - Identify and label your stress levels

How do you feel right now? Acknowledge your thoughts and feelings; they are valid. Let yourself feel what you are feeling right now. Circle the words that describe your feelings? Add words as needed.



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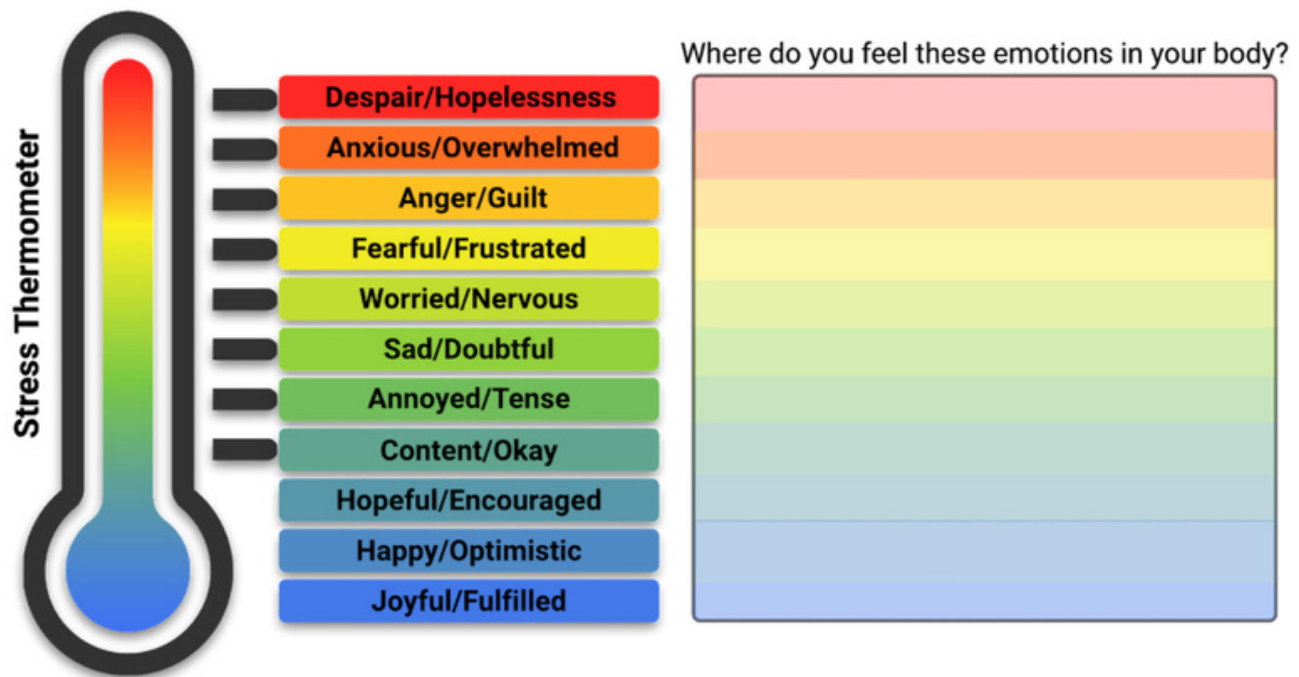


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The Stress Thermometer

2. Connect Mind & Body - Observe where you feel stress in your body

Where in your body do you feel stress? In your gut; heart; tensed shoulders; headaches; low energy; other? This can help you recognize signs of stress early. Write down in the box below where you think you feel your stress to help you connect your mind and body.



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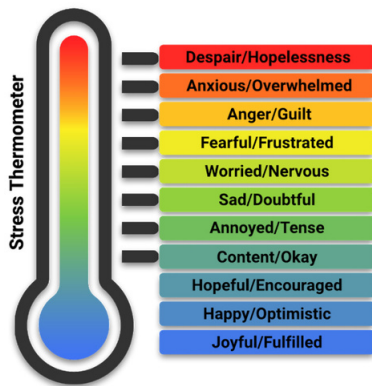
The Stress Thermometer

3. Identify Triggers - Discover the triggers that activate or increase your stress

What do you think triggers your stress? What increases your stress levels?

Think about where you placed yourself on the stress thermometer.

Write in the colored boxes below what contributes to you feeling this way.



CONTROLLING WHAT YOU CAN

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Sort Your Spheres

4. Sort Your Spheres - Recognize aspects of stress that you can control

Sort between what you *can* control, what you *can* influence, and what you *can't* control or influence.



What you **can** control



What you **can** influence



What you **can't** control or influence

CONTROLLING WHAT YOU CAN

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4. Sort Your Spheres Cont. - Recognize aspects of stress that you can control

It may be difficult to recognize what is and what is not within your control or influence. If needed, reference the guiding questions below to help push your thinking and see if there is an aspect of a trigger or situation you can control or influence in a way you might not have noticed before.

Could I have greater control or influence if I . . .

- gained additional information?
- developed a new skill?
- developed, changed, or broke a habit?
- changed something in my environment?
- reached out to someone else?
- shifted my priorities or mindset?

CREATE AN ACTION PLAN

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5. **Take Action** - Create a meaningful action plan to prevent and lower stress

What could I do to **prevent** my stress levels from rising?

What could I do to **lower** my stress levels as needed?

THE GUILT METER

Note: This reflection activity is based on current research and therapeutic practices, but is not meant to replace the care or advice given from medical professionals. This guilt meter is to be used as a tool, the word descriptions and levels may not reflect your range of guilt and you may not experience these emotions in the sequence shown below.



This reflection activity is a tool to help you:

- Recognize your guilt level
- Create an action plan to prevent and lower your guilt

1. Assess Guilt - Recognize your guilt level

Read through the guilt meter below, where do you feel your guilt levels are? Acknowledge your thoughts and feelings; they are valid. Understand that you likely won't be able to avoid guilt while being a caregiver. Let the good guilt guide you and acknowledge the rest as unhelpful and needing to be addressed.



THE GUILT METER

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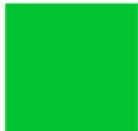
This reflection activity is a tool to help you:

- Recognize your guilt level
- Create an action plan to prevent and lower your guilt

2. Take action - Create an action plan to prevent and lower your guilt

Where did you place yourself on the guilt meter? Refer to the action ideas below and determine what you will do as you notice your guilt levels rising.

① No Guilt



Action idea - Strive to be mindful of how this feels for you.

② Guilt that guides and subsides



Action idea - Continue to let moments of guilt guide you to improve yourself.

③ Guilt that is unnecessary but manageable



Action idea - Reflect on your guilt and any underlying feelings. Recognize that your guilt may be a result of conflicting feelings and not negative actions on your part.

④ Guilt that needs conscious management



Action idea - Practice self-compassion. If a friend was in your shoes, what would you say to them? Seek to change your "ideal" to a more realistic goal.

⑤ Guilt that can harm if not managed



Action idea - Recognize that you may be feeling guilt for something you can't control or change. Label that guilt as unhealthy and remind yourself, "I did the best I could with the knowledge and resources I had."

⑥ Toxic Guilt



Action idea - Find a friend or family member to share how you're feeling. Seek the help of a qualified health professional as needed.

ADDITIONAL IDEAS AND RESOURCES

To Help Improve and Maintain Caregiver Mental & Emotional Health

Physical Health & Activity: A strong mind-body connection exists such that physical activity and health can directly impact mental and emotional health.

- Practicing yoga
- Visiting with medical doctors
- Psychiatrists/psychologists
- Chiropractors
- Acupuncture and other non-Western medicine providers

Social Activity: A strong connection exists between your mental and emotional health and your social health. Too many caregivers find themselves feeling alone and isolated.

- Join a caregiver support group
 - Local/in-person
 - Online - Be sure to join the Community for Caregivers Facebook Group
- Time with (a) good friend(s)
- Join a fitness club or interest group

Self-Reflection and Self-Care: It is crucial to make yourself a priority and make time for yourself.

- Get rest and respite
- Keep a journal
- Keep a gratitude journal
- Perform breathing exercises
- Spend time in nature
- Make time for yourself. What fills your tank? Make a list and do something on it. Show yourself you are important to you.

Spiritual Practice: Connecting with a higher power can strengthen you.

- Connect with a faith community or spiritual group
- Recognize a higher power
- Practice principles of grace, forgiveness, and peaceful problem solving
- Personal devotional/worship habits (scripture, inspirational reading, prayer, spiritual meditation)

ADDITIONAL IDEAS AND RESOURCES

Continued

Service: Research shows that when we help others, we feel better.

- Volunteer for a higher cause
- There are many places you can volunteer: Community centers, libraries, hospitals, faith organizations, animal shelters, food banks, etc.
- Or informally serve people around you (neighbors, family, friends)

Therapy & Counseling: There are wonderful tools to help guard and improve our mental and emotional health. There is power in sharing.

- One-on-one therapy (e.g., CBT, DBT, EMDR)
- Support groups
- Many providers have both in-person and online options

Tapping Into Your Creativity: Being creative improves your health.

- Visual arts (e.g., draw, color, sculpt, paint)
- Knit, sew, crochet
- Write
- Musical arts (e.g., sing, dance, play an instrument)
- Create in whatever way brings you joy and helps you feel “in the flow”

Emergency Contacts

- Emergency Medical Services: 911
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-TALK (8255)
- SAMHSA Treatment Referral Helpline: 1-877-SAMHSA7 (1-877-726-4727)

**This is not a comprehensive list, and as with all that is taught in this course, you are encouraged to seek help from qualified medical and mental-health professionals to obtain appropriate assessments and corresponding treatment plans.*

