CARE Compass

Helping Navigate the Later Stages of Dementia



Journaling for Caregivers

Sanders-Brown
Center on Aging

This project was made possible by a generous gift.

The goal of the program is to help provide tools and information so that you can navigate the later stages of dementia. We hope that you find these videos and resources to be helpful and encouraging.

This program is designed to be a guide only for the compassionate care and support of your loved one and is not medical advice. If you have questions or concerns, always check with your doctor.

We also want to acknowledge that late-stage dementia can look very different from person to person. Sometimes the ideas we share may not work or work for a short time. That is okay. No one person is alike, and what works today may not work tomorrow. We hope to provide tools that can be options for you to try.

This guide contains links and other resources that may not be provided by the presenter but are added to the guide to provide additional information and support

Self-Care for Caregivers

Caregiving can take a toll on your body, mind, relationships, and finances.

Taking care of yourself is not selfish; it allows you to continue caring for others.

Check-in With Yourself. Take a moment to slow down and ask:

How am I feeling right now?

What do I need?

What is helping me cope?

What is no longer working?

Your needs may change as your loved one needs change. It is okay to adjust your approach and try something new.

Journaling can provide a private space to process thoughts and feelings. It doesn't need to be formal or take much time.

Use a notebook, your phone, or a voice recording. Don't worry about grammar or complete sentences, just write what comes to mind!

Try these prompts:

What is most important to me today?

What are three things I'm grateful for?

What is causing me to have resentment?

What am I doing to take care of myself?

What am I proud of this past week?

Was there a situation in the past week that I could have handled differently?

Somedays you may not feel like writing and that is okay, somedays you may only have a few words to write that is okay. Here are some prompts where you just complete the sentence.

Today was hard because…

Right now, my heart feels…

What I want to say out loud but cannot…

One thing I am proud of today (even if it is tiny) …

One thing that made me smile today….

Self-Care doesn't have to be complicated. Small adjustments can make a difference:

Take a few quiet minutes to yourself if you can

Step outside

Talk with someone you trust, this can be a voice message to them, text message, or phone call

Ask for help when you need it

Try and new strategy when something isn't working.

Be gentle with yourself, *give yourself credit for what you're already doing*.

Check in with yourself often and make small adjustments along the way.

Your well-being is important, too.



I'M SO STRESSED OUT!

Is it stress or anxiety?

Stress

- Generally is a response to an *external* cause, such as taking a big test or arguing with a friend.
- Goes away once the situation is resolved.
- Can be positive or negative. For example, it may inspire you to meet a deadline, or it may cause you to lose sleep.

Both Stress and Anxiety

Both stress and anxiety can affect your mind and body. You may experience symptoms such as:

- Excessive worry
- Uneasiness
- Tension
- Headaches or body pain
- High blood pressure
- Loss of sleep

Anxiety

- Generally is *internal*, meaning it's your reaction to stress.
- Usually involves a persistent feeling of apprehension or dread that doesn't go away, and that interferes with how you live your life.
- Is constant, even if there is no immediate threat.

Ways to Cope

- Keep a journal.
- Download an app with relaxation exercises.
- Exercise and eat healthy.
- Get regular sleep.
- Avoid excess caffeine.
- Identify and challenge your negative thoughts.
- Reach out to your friends or family.

Find Help

If you are struggling to cope, or the symptoms of your stress or anxiety begin to interfere with your everyday life, it may be time to talk to a professional. Find more information about getting help on the National Institute of Mental Health website at **www.nimh.nih.gov/findhelp**.

National Institute of Mental Health

nimh.nih.gov/stressandanxiety

NIMH Identifier No. OM 20-4319

Websites for more information:

CDC Reviews ways to manage stress

https://www.cdc.gov/mental-health/living-with/index.html

VA Caregiver Support Program- Art Journaling for Caregivers

https://www.caregiver.va.gov/CAREGIVER/support/Art_Journaling_Caregivers.asp