












# SELF-CARE HANDBOOK



"There are four kinds of people in the world: those who have been caregivers, those who are currently caregivers, those who will be caregivers, and those who will need caregivers."

– Former First Lady Rosalynn Carter

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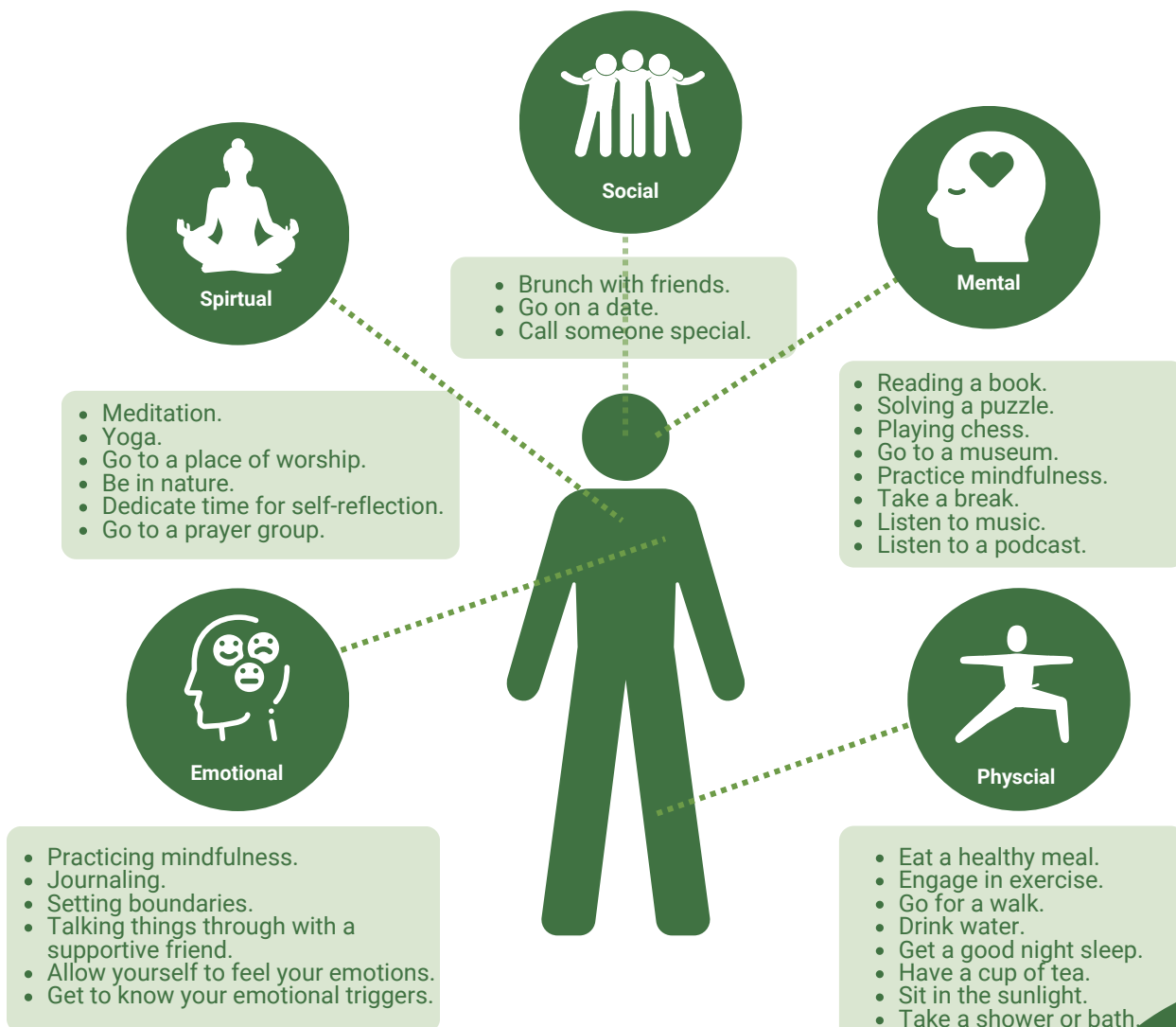
# SELF-CARE

The process of taking care of oneself with behaviors that promote health and active management of illness when it occurs. Self-care includes anything you do to keep yourself healthy: physically, mentally, and spiritually. Not practicing Self-Care has consequences such as burnout, depression, anxiety, resentment, and other negative implications.

## BENEFITS OF SELF-CARE

- Self-care can improve your physical health.
- Self-care can reduce stress and anxiety.
- Self-care can boost your self-esteem.
- Self-care protects your mental health.
- Self-care can lead to better relationships.

## TYPES OF SELF-CARE



**“Remember to put your own oxygen mask on first before assisting others.”**

**Airline Attendants**



# DEPRESSION

## Causes of Depression

- High anxiety and agitation
- Reaction to event or death
- Symptoms of another disorder or disease
- Not being able to do everyday tasks
- A side effect of medication
- Not being able to do the things previously enjoyed
- Feeling stressed or worried over issues such as money, relationships or the future
- Loss of independence
- Increasing reliance on others
- Confusion and loss of memory
- Environmental factors
- Inability to go out alone
- Physical illness
- Social isolation
- Fatigue

## WARNING SIGNS OF DEPRESSION

A family caregiver suffering from major depression experiences a combination of at least five of the following for at least a 2-week period:



Forgetfulness



Helplessness



Depression



Constipation



Anxious



Poor Sleep



Loss of Libido



Exhaustion



Quick to Anger



Loss of Enjoyment



Lack of Energy



Aches and Pain

## WHAT ARE YOUR WARNING SIGNS?

### 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

You can call, text, or chat at 988, you will be connected to a trained counselor. They will listen, provide support, and connect you to resources.

Talk to your healthcare provider. Proper diagnosis and treatment can improve the sense of well-being and function.



# CAREGIVER BURNOUT

Caregiver burnout is a state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion. It may be accompanied by a change in attitude. Burnout can occur when caregivers do not get the help they need, or if they try to do more than they are able. When you can identify warning signs of burnout and learn interventions to reduce stress, your caregiving tasks will be more manageable and enjoyable.

## COMMON SIGNS OF CAREGIVER BURNOUT



**Forgetfulness**



**Helplessness**



**Depression**



**Crying**



**Withdrawing**



**Anxious**



**Exhaustion**



**Quick to  
Anger**



**Overreacting**



**Changes in  
Eating Patterns**

### Here are some suggestions to help cope:

- Develop a support network.
- Attend a support group to receive positive feedback and coping strategies from others in similar situations.
- Consult with a professional counselor for one-on-one counseling.
- Maintain good health by exercising regularly and eating a healthy diet.
- Take regular time out for journaling, meditating or contemplation.
- Stay involved in hobbies and activities you enjoy.

Sometimes caregivers do not realize that they are experiencing caregiver burnout even if they have acknowledged to themselves or to others that they feel an increasing amount of stress and pressure.

### Here are some questions to ask yourself:

1. Do I feel any symptoms of depression?
2. Do I feel like I'm being pulled in multiple directions?
3. Do I feel trapped in my role as a caregiver?
4. Is there a conflict between the people closest to me? Or my care recipient?
5. Do I feel not unsupported by other people?
6. Is my care recipient placing unrealistic demands and expectations on me?
7. Do I feel I am unable to meet the expectations and needs of my care recipient?
8. Am I unable to communicate effectively with others?
9. Is my health getting worse?
10. Am I overwhelmed?

Click this link to complete the Aging Care [\*\*Caregiver Burden Self-Assessment\*\*](#).

# IDEAS FOR SELF-CARE

## ● **Journal your thoughts.**

Journaling 15 to 20 minutes a day, three to five times over the course of a four-month period can lower blood pressure and improve liver functionality. Just start writing, do not censor yourself. Remember journaling is for you.

## ● **Join a Support Group.**

Support Groups allow you to talk with others who truly understand what you are going through, reduce stress, validate your experience, and give connection and support.

To find a support group near you contact your local Commission on Aging or Area Agency on Aging.

## ● **Attend to your own healthcare needs.**

Family caregivers are less likely to practice preventive healthcare and are more likely to have a chronic illness. Nearly 72% of caregivers reported that they had not gone to the doctor as often as they should, and 55% had missed doctor's appointments. Schedule a visit to your doctor, dentist, and optometrist and follow through on attending it.

## ● **Exercise Regularly.**

Caregiver's self-care suffers because they lack the time and energy to exercise. 58% of caregivers say their exercising habits are worse after caregiving for someone. Exercise can provide an outlet for your stress, help you sleep better, and increase energy levels. 20 minutes of exercise a day can help you maintain a healthy weight, reduce stress, and improve your overall health and well-being.

## ● **Take a Caregiver Workshop.**

There are several caregiver workshops available with some being disease-specific. Attending a Caregiver workshop can provide you with information, helpful strategies, and tips for caregiving. Check with your local Senior Center and Region 9 AAA to see what classes are available.

## ● **Repeat Positive Self-affirmations.**

Self-affirmations are positive statements we make about ourselves to strengthen and build our self-worth and empower us. Empowerment starts and ends with you. It is something you do for yourself. It is your own inner power and authority to have control over the choices in your life. One example is "I am strong and can overcome any challenge that comes my way."

## ● **Visit with family members and friends.**

Focus on maintaining the right friendships that lift you up rather than bring you down. Make a reasonable effort to keep up with friends, even if you cannot spend a lot of time with them. The smallest gestures like emails, phone calls, or a quick lunch date, or a cup of coffee would be meaningful to both of you.

# IDEAS FOR SELF-CARE

## ● **Learn and Use Stress-Reduction Techniques.**

There are tools, strategies, and techniques that can help you manage the stress in your life. Whatever form of meditation you choose can provide a greater sense of peace. Meditation helps caregivers live in the moment, let go of past regrets, and live without worries about the future. It takes 12 to 20 minutes per day to engage in a stress-reduction technique. Practicing relaxation techniques can have many benefits, including lowering blood pressure, improving sleep quality, and reducing anger and frustration.

## ● **Keep up with your hobbies and interests.**

Caregiving can also result in feeling a loss of self-identity. Try to maintain at least one hobby or interest. Do not underestimate the power of time spent on self-care. It is not selfish to focus on yourself; it will restore your energy levels. The day will come when caregiving ends, and you will need your hobbies and interests to help you adjust to your new normal.

## ● **Find or visit a therapist.**

It is estimated 46-59% of caregivers are clinically depressed. Discuss the signs of depression with your healthcare provider. Proper diagnosis and treatment can improve the sense of well-being and function. A therapist can help you work through such issues and develop coping mechanisms. If you do not know where to turn, ask your healthcare provider for a referral.

## ● **Set limits for what you can do.**

Setting clear boundaries and limitations is the first step in caring for yourself and avoiding caregiver burnout. Learn to say the word “no” without giving a reason why. As a caregiver, your plate is full. You are not obligated to do more than you are already doing. There are only so many hours in the day; you need to be realistic and prioritize. Recognize your own limitations and do not be afraid to ask for assistance from others.

## ● **Deal with Difficult Feelings.**

Many feelings come up when you are caring for someone day in and day out. Feelings of inadequacy, regret, guilt, and even resentment are normal. Do not shy away from your emotions, but do not give in to them either. Acknowledge your feelings, and learn to let them go. Not paying attention to your feelings can lead to poor sleep, illness, trouble coping, stress eating, and substance abuse. When you admit to your feelings, you can then find productive ways to express them and deal with them. This enables you to be happier and healthier, allowing you to provide better care to your care provider.

# SELF-CARE TIPS



## Engage in physical activity.

Exercise can help reduce levels of stress and anxiety, improve balance and lower the risk of falls, enhance sleep, and reduce feelings of depression.



## Eat a healthy diet.

Having a healthy diet can support muscles and strengthen bones, which can help with balance and independence.



## Schedule regular visits with a doctor.

Staying on top of doctor visits may help reduce risk factors for disease such as high blood pressure and cholesterol levels.



## Ask for help.

Make a list of ways others can help. For instance, someone might pick up groceries or sit with the person while you do errands.



## Get organized.

Make to-do lists, and set a daily routine.

# GIVE YOURSELF PERMISSION TO



## Go to bed early!



## Take a break.



## Call a friend.



## Set boundaries.



## Forgive yourself.

# GENTLE REMINDERS



## Take a deep breath.



## Everything will work out.



## Treat others with kindness.



## Do your best.

**“You cannot always control what goes on outside. But you can always control what goes on inside.”**  
—Wayne Dyer





# SELF-AFFIRMATIONS

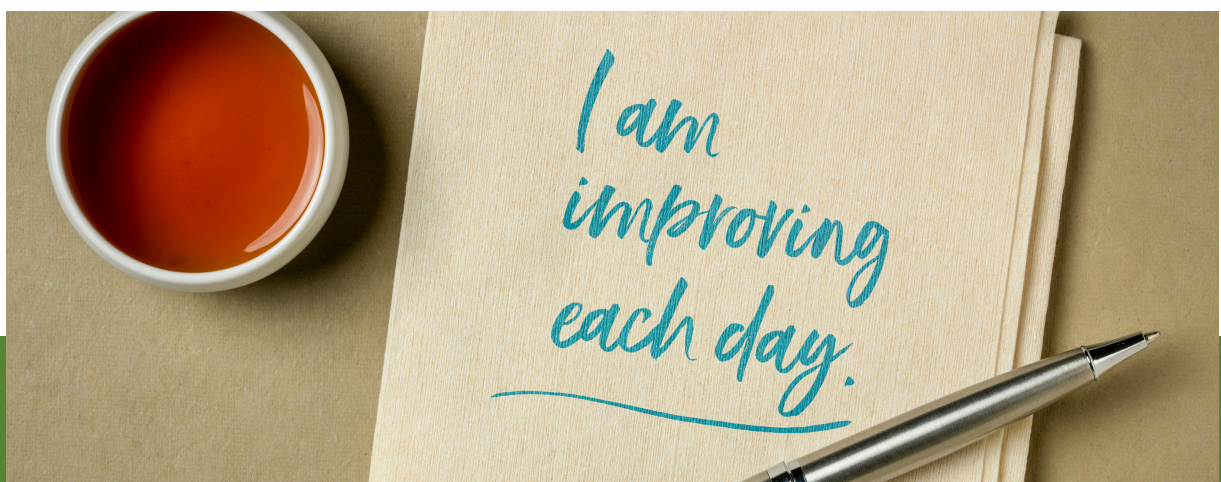
Self-affirmations are positive statements we make about ourselves to strengthen or build our self-worth. Affirmations can inspire you, motivate you, and increase your self-esteem.

- I deserve time for myself and can attend to my own emotional, physical, and spiritual needs without guilt or apology.
- I am strong and can overcome challenges that come my way.
- I will stay positive and work on one problem at a time.
- I continue to learn and take responsibility for my boundaries by setting limits and advocating for myself.
- I am an essential part of the support that helps my loved one to get well.
- I am grateful for the life I have.
- I have the courage and capacity to overcome challenges that come my way.
- I accept myself as I am.
- I will find joy in the everyday day moments of life.
- I deserve to be joyful, happy, and successful.
- I love and respect myself.
- I am in control of my thoughts, feelings, and choices.
- Or create your own self-affirmation.

## WHAT ARE THE POSITIVE ASPECTS OF CAREGIVING?

We often hear about the sacrifices caregivers make, but often we do not hear enough about the benefits of being a caregiver. Caregivers gain a lot from their role.

- A sense of fulfillment.
- Establishment of extended social networks or friendship groups associated with caregiving.
- Feeling needed and useful.
- You understand what you truly value.
- Learning something about one's self, others, and the meaning of life.
- Sense of giving back to someone who has cared for them.
- Satisfaction of knowing that their loved one is getting excellent care.
- Personal growth.
- You will learn who your true friends and family are.
- You become confident in your ability to handle anything.



# GRATITUDE JOURNAL

Gratitude prompts can help you discover all the amazing things you are grateful for in your life. It is perfect for all ages and genders.



What moments this week are you thankful for?



What are you thankful for about where you live?



Who are you thankful for and why?



What talents do you have that you are thankful for?

## SELF-REFLECTION PROMPTS

Self-reflection prompts can help you when you are feeling overwhelmed or do not know what to do. Journaling allows you to take a moment to pause and reflect to ensure you are checking in with your needs.



What makes you feel powerful?



What's a goal you want to accomplish and why?



How do you ask for help or support when you need it?



How do you practice self-love and self-kindness?

**“As you grow older, you will discover that you have two hands, one for helping yourself, the other for helping others.”  
— Maya Angelou**

# CHANGE YOUR MINDSET

Here are some ways that may help you change your mindset to a more positive one:

## Positive Mindset



See failure as an opportunity.



Differentiate one problem from others.



Generalizing the causes of bad things.



See the gain.



Making the best of any situation.

## Negative Mindset



See failure as loss.



Overgeneralizing problem.



Self-blaming for bad things.



See the pain.



Fixating on being powerless.

## POSITIVE SELF-TALK VS NEGATIVE SELF-TALK

Self-talk is a huge part of our self-esteem and confidence. By working on replacing negative self-talk with more positive self-talk, you're more likely to feel in control of stuff that's going on in your life and to achieve your goals. Positive self-talk makes you feel good about yourself and the things that are going on in your life. It's like having an optimistic voice in your head that always looks on the bright side. Negative self-talk makes you feel pretty crappy about yourself and the things that are going on.



Whoops, I made a mistake.



Whatever happens, I will handle it.



This really hurt, but I am going to keep trying.



I may not be able to control the situation, but I can control how I respond.



I am not good enough.



I give up. I will never be able to do this.



I cannot do anything right.



What is the point? There is nothing I can do about it.

**You cannot pour from an Empty Cup!  
Take care of yourself first!**





# SELF-CARE EXAMPLES

These are just some ideas for how you can practice self-care. Do what makes you feel the most rested and at peace is unique to you.

- Watch your favorite show
- Turn your phone off for a bit
- Go for a drive (no destination required)
- Put on an outfit that makes you feel good
- Practice yoga
- Sleep with a weighted blanket
- Try learning something new
- Let yourself have a good cry
- Implement a morning and night routine you enjoy
- Make a playlist of your favorite songs
- Write down 5 things you love about yourself
- Try out an adult coloring book
- Listen to a podcast or audiobook
- Do something creative
- Bake a delicious treat
- Clean out your email inbox
- Organize or rearrange your space
- Buy yourself flowers
- Exercise in a way that feels good for you
- Write down 5 things you're grateful for
- Spend quality time with friends or family
- Turn on a diffuser with your favorite essential oils
- Watch the sunset
- Practice mindful meditation
- Call or text someone you love
- Drink a cup of tea or coffee
- Journal about how you're feeling
- Take some deep breaths
- Listen to your favorite music
- Go for a long walk in nature
- Cook or order your favorite meal
- Read a book
- Light your favorite candle
- Do a digital detox
- Go to your favorite place
- Stretch
- Try a new face mask
- Read inspirational quotes
- Start a skincare routine
- Take a bath or shower
- Watch your favorite show
- Write a letter to a loved one
- Sit and be still for ten minutes
- Do a full-body scan
- Take a break from the news

**“I have come to believe that caring for myself is not self-indulgent. Caring for myself is an act of survival.”  
— Audre Lorde**



# CAREGIVER EMERGENCY STRESS PLAN

When you are stressed and overwhelmed pull this Emergency Stress Plan out. It will make the stressful situation easier to deal with, by offering specific suggestions for how to use each tip to reduce caregiver stress and boost overall health and well-being.

## CHECKLIST:

- |  |        |  |
|--|--------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Reframe your thinking.  | —————→ | Practice positive thinking, and affirmations.                                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Calm your breathing.  | —————→ | Practice meditation, deep breathing.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Reach out to others.  | —————→ | Stay in touch with family and friends and accept help or join a support group. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Give yourself a mental break by some form of distraction.                         | —————→ | Practice forms of self-care.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Make a list, seek more information, and identify the source of stress or problem. | —————→ | Set goals you can meet.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Take action, do the first step.   | —————→ | Get connected to community resources.  |

## FORMS OF SELF-CARE:

- |                   |                       |                     |
|-------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|
| • Take a hot bath | • Go on a walk        | • Go to bed early   |
| • Take a nap      | • Sit in the sunshine | • Work on a puzzle  |
| • Watch T.V.      | • Listen to music     | • Apply a face mask |

## WHO CAN I CONTACT:



## SOURCE OF STRESS:



## SELF-CARE PRACTICE:

01



## SELF-CARE PRACTICE:

02



## NOTES:





# JOURNAL PROMPTS

Do you allow yourself time to relax and breathe? If the answer is no, what can you do to give yourself this time?

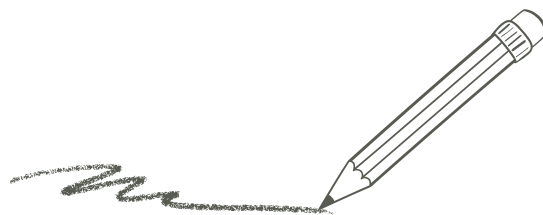
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What drains or overwhelms you? Why?  
Is this something you can change?



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**"A JOURNAL CAN OFFER YOU A PLACE TO BE  
SOMEONE, ANYONE, WHO YOU WANT TO BE."**

**— BRIAN LEDGER**



# JOURNAL PROMPTS



Something to vent about ...

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I'm going to take these actions to help myself by ...

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I could use help with ...

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Something I am grateful for ...

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**"JOURNALING IS LIKE WHISPERING TO ONE'S SELF  
AND LISTENING AT THE SAME TIME."**

**MINA MURRAY**

# WHAT IF YOU CANNOT THINK OF ANYTHING TO WRITE ABOUT?

Start with an image.



Use a sentence to start.



Write whatever is in your head.



**"JOURNALING IS LIKE WHISPERING TO ONE'S SELF  
AND LISTENING AT THE SAME TIME."**

**MINA MURRAY**



# RESOURCES

- Area Agency on Aging
- Adult Day Center
- Commission County/Council on Aging
- Online Resources (YouTube, Trualta)
- Therapist
- 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline
- Disease Specific Organizations (Alzheimer's Association, Parkinson's Disease)

## TAKE ACTION

**Self-care needs to be something you actively plan, rather than something that just happens. It is an active choice and you must treat it as such.**

- Look within:
  - What do you need to be happy?
- Learn your warning signs.
- Commit to Self-Care Practices.
- Write Your Plan:
  - What am I doing, how much, how long:
  - What am I doing that undermines my well-being?
  - What am I doing that supports well-being?
  - What do I want to add to be the best me?
- Select some goals that give the best outcome.
- Do not wait until you are overwhelmed.
- Follow through on your plan.



## CONTACT



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The NEMCSA Region 9 Area Agency on Aging (AAA) is pleased to provide you with this guidebook of helpful materials and publications directed toward family caregivers.