



Families  for
Depression Awareness

Building Your Family Caregiver Toolkit

Strategies for
Supporting Loved
Ones to Get Well

Building Your Toolkit



Caregiving for a loved one can be a rewarding experience. It comes with challenges but with the right tools, you can navigate it successfully. In this workbook, we'll help you understand the kinds of resources you need to build a robust caregiver toolkit.

You'll identify the areas in which you are already succeeding and find opportunities to build more support. Although this resource is not exhaustive, we will touch on many topics and provide direction for ways to keep learning. Go at your own pace. If you feel overwhelmed, take a break. Be compassionate with yourself: you've got a lot going on and you're in the process of getting it more under control.

Caregiver Tool #1: Self-Care Strategies



"You can't pour from an empty cup."

When you hear the term "self-care," what comes to mind? You might think self-care must be made up of dedicated "me-time," luxurious pampering, and intense gym workouts. Who has time or energy for that?! Sure, we would love if everyone had the resources for a weekly spa day, but that is not a reality for the majority of caregivers and, really, a spa day is not what many want or need.

Try to think of self-care as filling your cup so that you have something to share with others. You must take care of yourself, first, so that you have the capacity to take care of others. Practicing good self-care also shows your loved ones that health is a priority.

What is self-care?

Self-care is an intentional act of giving back to yourself in an effort to strengthen or maintain your overall wellness. The act must be something you enjoy doing or that gives you a sense of satisfaction.

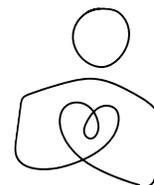
Start simple and assess your current self-care by using the acronym **"SEEM."**

S - Sleep (Are you getting enough and is it good quality?)

E - Exercise (Are you moving your body each day?)

E - Eating (Are you eating nutritional food and hydrating?)

M - Mindfulness (Are you focused on the present moment without judging your thought?)



If your work or home life doesn't leave room for enough sleep or healthy foods are hard to come by, do your best.

Setting Boundaries

One other critical element of self-care is setting and enforcing boundaries. Boundaries are limits you set that tell others the kinds of behaviors or interactions that you will and will not accept. Often, when our boundaries are broken, we don't recognize it happening but we can notice the feelings attached to it, such as discomfort, frustration, or resentment.

Mental health symptoms can get in the way of a person respecting your boundaries. That doesn't make your boundaries irrelevant or wrong. Setting boundaries is not selfish or cruel. You may have to be flexible, reevaluate them, or get your loved one more support before enforcing your boundaries.

Sample questions to help learn your boundaries

- What tasks are you willing to take on? (e.g. "Until you are feeling better, I will take over all the household chores during the week, and I need you to pitch in on the weekends.")
- How will you speak to each other during times of disagreement or elevated emotions (e.g., "If one of us raises our voice, we will stop the conversation and take a break.")



List your personal boundaries

Self-Care Strategies

Commit to your own wellness right now. Identify the self-care activities you already do and consider the activities you want to add to your list.

Here are some self-care ideas to get you started:

- Listen to uplifting music
- Watch a favorite show or movie
- Spend time with positive people
- Pray or meditate
- Color or do something creative
- Say 3 affirmations or gratitudes

Write a list of self-care ideas



Now it's time to make a plan! Choose a day and time you can practice at least one activity from your list. It can help to tie this activity to something you already do well. For example, "say three affirmations when I brush my teeth" or "take a deep breath before I check my phone."

I will _____ by _____ (date/time)

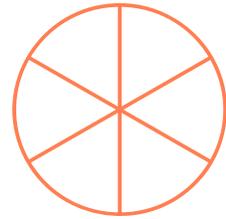
30 Days of Self-Care

Try this 30-day challenge to find new strategies! You can do them in order or pick a random square. As you progress through the month, take note of the activities that you'd like to add to your toolkit.

| | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|--|
| DAY 1 Start a gratitude journal | DAY 2 Try a meditation video | DAY 3 Spend the day social media free | DAY 4 Listen to your favorite song | DAY 5 Take a 15 minute walk outdoors |
| DAY 6 Listen to a podcast | DAY 7 Say 3 affirmations | DAY 8 Stretch for 10-15 minutes | DAY 9 Practice deep breathing | DAY 10 Call someone you love |
| DAY 11 Watch a funny video | DAY 12 Read a book for 15 minutes | DAY 13 Write a list of short-term goals | DAY 14 De-clutter a room or desk | DAY 15 Have a game night |
| DAY 16 Go to bed 30 minutes earlier | DAY 17 Start your day with a glass of water | DAY 18 Read inspirational quotes | DAY 19 Do something nice for yourself | DAY 20 Spend time with a friend or pet |
| DAY 21 Watch a movie or series | DAY 22 Journal for 5-minutes | DAY 23 Say "no" to something | DAY 24 Take 3 deep belly breaths | DAY 25 Make your favorite meal |
| DAY 26 Mindfully eat one meal or snack | DAY 27 Spend some time outside | DAY 28 Name 5 blue things you can see | DAY 29 Watch the sunrise or sunset | DAY 30 Color or do something creative |

Balance Your Self-Care

Once you set up a self-care routine, it can help to see if you are building practices throughout the different dimensions of your life. The Self-Care Wheel is a tool you can use.



Download a copy, <http://bit.ly/scwheel>, or draw one yourself! Create a circle with six segments: physical, psychological, emotional, spiritual, personal, and professional/academic. Fill in each section with self-care activities that nourish that dimension of wellness. Notice if there are areas where you may not have many strategies. Try to brainstorm other self-care activities you could do in the areas that may need more attention.

Self-care is great AND we all need professional help from time to time. Find a therapist of your own if you notice that self-care isn't helping you to be well.

Caregiver Tool #2: Realistic Expectations



"Help isn't help if it doesn't help." ~Pat Deegan

Your loved one's depression may be chronic, recurring, and/or episodic. As a caregiver, it can be painful to watch your loved one struggle as you grapple with which strategies might provide them some relief. And, sometimes your "help" doesn't help.

It's important that you remind yourself and your loved one that depression is a medical diagnosis. It takes time to heal, find treatment, and work toward wellness. Remember, everyone in your family is doing the best they can given the circumstances you all are in.

Stages of Change

How can you realistically manage expectations? This is where the Stages of Change model can help.

According to this model, each person moves along the path to change at their own pace and not necessarily in a single direction. The “change” might relate, for example, to acknowledging their depression or seeking treatment.

When you know what stage your loved one is in with regard to depression, you can have a better sense of perspective and a more realistic set of expectations than having no context for their experience.



Do you see your loved one reflected in any of the following stages?

Pre-contemplation: "I'm not thinking about making a change or even the need for it."

Contemplation: "I'm not sure if I need to change, but maybe there's something going on."

Preparation: "I'm working on changing and have taken some small steps forward."

Action: "I'm changing! I'm making progress toward a diagnosis or treatment."

Maintenance: "I've changed and I'm sticking to it. I'm going to therapy and working on self-care."

Relapse: "I'm struggling again."

Watch our Stages of Change series for tips on how to support yourself and your loved one through each stage, <http://familyaware.org/stages-of-change/>

Caregiver Tool #3: Defining Your Role

You may take on a variety of roles as a family caregiver. Check off the roles you are able to support. Consider where you might look for help from family members or friends to fill other roles.

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Finding providers | <input type="checkbox"/> Responding to crisis situations |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tracking symptoms | <input type="checkbox"/> Coordinating transportation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Managing finances | <input type="checkbox"/> Performing household duties |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Evaluating treatment options | <input type="checkbox"/> Providing childcare |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Addressing insurance issues | <input type="checkbox"/> Providing emotional support |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Advocating for appropriate treatment (e.g., supporting changes in treatment) | <input type="checkbox"/> Managing medication (e.g., filling prescriptions, checking in with your loved one) |

List any additional roles that come to mind:

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____



Depression symptoms often interfere with a person's ability to perform daily life activities. It can be hard not to take charge when your loved one is struggling, but you don't want them to feel powerless. Work **WITH** them, not without them. By respecting their autonomy, you can reinforce their sense of self-worth and build on their successes as their health improves.

Caregiver Tool #4: Resources



Sometimes it may feel like you are on an island. You might feel like you are the only person going through your situation. Depression affects everyone in a family and the experience for caregivers can be extremely isolating.

Fortunately, there are many resources to help you and your family. Just as your loved one's condition will change, the information and tools you need will change. As a lifelong learner, you'll find new ideas, strategies, and inspiration along the way.

We recommended starting with **educational resources**. The more you know about your loved one's condition, the more prepared you will be to provide support.

Depression Overview

Depression is a medical condition that affects the way a person functions, feels, thinks, and behaves, impacting even their own view of themselves and the world. Although depression includes a variety of symptoms, a person may only experience a few in order to be diagnosed. The three key factors are



- (1) the symptoms have to be a **change** from how the person was feeling, thinking, or behaving
- (2) the symptoms have to affect a person's ability to function in their everyday life ("impairment")
- (3) the symptoms and impairment need to have existed for at least 2 weeks.

If your loved one is experiencing some of the following symptoms, their functioning is impaired because of the symptoms, and the symptoms have lasted at least 2 weeks, it's time to get checked by a medical or mental health provider.

Common depression symptoms

- Feeling miserable, sad, or empty; having irritable mood
- Losing interest in previously-enjoyed activities or people
- Unexplained change in sleep, eating habits, or weight
- Having low self-esteem
- Experiencing unexplained aches and pains
- Having thoughts of suicide

You might notice them

- Talking very negatively or expressing hopelessness
- Acting without concern for others
- Abusing substances
- Picking fights or being irritable, critical, or mean
- Withdrawing from people
- Having trouble functioning at work or school

You can find more information on our website,
<https://familyaware.org/what-is-a-mood-disorder/>

Caregiver Tool #4: Resources

Responding to Crisis



If your loved one is talking about or attempting suicide, do not delay in getting them help. Stay with them until they receive professional help and report feeling safe. Communicate your concern and try to offer them a choice: "I hear that you are in extreme pain and help is needed. Do you want to call your doctor together or should we immediately go to crisis care?" If they are not able to participate in decision making, urgently contact their provider, contact the local mobile crisis unit, or take them to the hospital emergency room. Learn more at <http://familyaware.org/education/suicide-prevention/>.

Assembling the Treatment Team

We recommend whenever possible families utilize both a treatment and support network.

A **treatment team** is a network of people and providers that support your loved one's treatment.

Includes

- Person living with depression
- You, the caregiver
- Professionals who diagnose and treat (e.g., primary care provider, therapist, etc.)

May also include

- Case manager or care coordinator
- Peer support specialist
- Pastoral counselors or other professionals

List the members of your loved one's treatment team:



Mental health counseling is a crucial part of treating mood disorders, so a therapist-client relationship that does not work out can feel especially crushing. Listen to yourself and your loved one and take action if the therapist is not the right fit. It's okay to look for someone who is a better match.

Assembling Your Support Network

A **support network** consists of people who support the caregiver with emotional and logistical challenges.

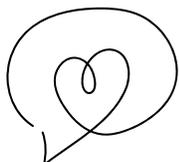
May include

- Relatives
- Close friends
- Members of your faith community
- Coworkers
- Neighbors
- Friends of your loved one
- Support group
- Your own therapist

Ways they could help you

- Emotional support
- Childcare
- Preparing meals
- Run errands (e.g. pick up groceries)
- Providing transportation
- Social outings so you can get a break

Make a list of your support network and tasks they can help you with. Think broadly about what might make your life a bit more manageable and who might be willing and able to support you.



When people ask, "How can I help," don't be shy about making requests.

Paying for Treatment

Because depression can affect the ability to concentrate, analyze, organize, and make decisions, your loved one may find it difficult sort through insurance and payment issues. You can support your loved one by knowing which payment options are available and helping them explore ways to limit costs.



There are three basic forms of paying for treatment:

- Private insurance (e.g., plan through work)
- Government-funded insurance (e.g., Medicaid, Medicare)
- Self-pay (e.g., out-of-pocket costs, co-payments, providers or services not covered by insurance)

Many medical and mental health services are covered by insurance. If your loved one has insurance, call the behavioral health number listed on the card to learn about covered services. If your loved one is not covered by insurance, don't let that stand in the way of them getting the care they need. "Free" or "low-cost" does not have to mean inferior care. To learn about your local resources, call 2-1-1.

Reviewing Legal Considerations

There are several documents that can help you and your loved one create clear guidelines for care. Their psychiatrist or therapist may be able to provide guidance or forms.

- HIPAA waiver/authorization with every each of your loved one's providers
- Authorization/waiver of health and educational privacy for students
- Psychiatric Advance Directive (<https://www.nrc-pad.org/>)
- Health Care Proxy
- Durable Power of Attorney



The best time to work on these is when your loved one is not experiencing a depressive episode. Consult with an attorney if your loved one may not be competent to make decisions for themselves.

Identifying Community Supports

Don't let depression isolate you from other people. You and your family are not alone. Take steps to form relationships within your community (which could include, for example, friends and neighbors, work colleagues, spiritual or faith communities, etc.) and encourage your family members to do the same.

Staying connected and having a sense of belonging can positively impact one's mental health. You'll have more networks to help you during difficult times.



Community Resources

How can you and your family strengthen and increase ties to your communities? Make a list of community resources that might help you or your loved one feel connected to others.

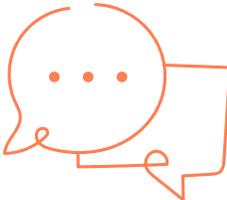
- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Community Health Center | <input type="checkbox"/> Library |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Local Recreation Groups | <input type="checkbox"/> Church/Temple/Place of Worship |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family Resource Center | <input type="checkbox"/> Meditation or Mindfulness Center |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fitness Center | <input type="checkbox"/> Volunteer Organization (e.g., animal shelter, food bank, etc.) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Teen or Senior Center | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Peer Support Group | |



Caregiver Tool #5: Effective Communication

Ideally, you and your loved one will have a good relationship and the ability to communicate openly. If not, start where you are and build up your skills. Check off the healthy styles of communication you use:

- Active listening
- Acknowledge what the person is saying
- Speak with "I" statements
- Reach out, even with no response
- Follow through on what you said you would do (builds trust)
- Stop conversations that escalate, allow time, return when appropriate



Watch our communication webinar to learn more about the strategies you did not check off, <http://familyaware.org/trainings>

When the caregiver road gets tough, repeat these affirmations

-  I am doing this because I love [person's name] _____
-  I will enforce my boundaries _____
-  This is hard for me and I will make it through tough times _____
-  _____
-  _____
-  _____
-  _____

Caregiver Tool #6: A Family Action Plan

Families for Depression Awareness

Making an Action Plan

Families for Depression Awareness is a national nonprofit organization helping families recognize and cope with depression and bipolar disorder to get people well and prevent suicides. Our website at www.familyaware.org has tools, information, and educational resources to help you and your loved ones address depression and bipolar disorder, and their impact on your family. © 2018 Families for Depression Awareness.

Families for Depression Awareness

Family Action Plan Template

Watching the Family Action Plan video and reviewing our educational materials are great steps for helping yourself and a loved one. Now, take what you've learned and put it into action. We've developed a template to help you to identify a problem and manageable steps to address it.

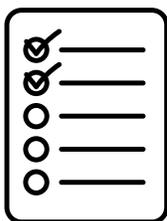
What is one specific problem that needs to be addressed? (Brainstorm a few, but choose one)

Why do you want to address the problem?

What are possible steps to address the problem?

Look at the steps you listed above. Are they realistic? If a step seems too big, break it down into smaller steps. Cross out any of the possibilities that are impractical. Now, circle the step you want to try first.

One of the hardest parts of caring for someone who has a mood disorder is deciding, as a family, how to best support that person when times get tough.

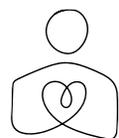


Learn how your family can come together to create an action plan in five manageable steps. You can download our Making An Action Plan template and watch our 4-minute tutorial to help guide the process. Visit our website, <https://familyaware.org/actionplan>

Toolkit Check In

What areas of your toolkit would you like to work on? Check off the areas you feel confident in and work on the areas you'd like more resources in.

- Caregiver Tool #1: Self-care Strategies
- Caregiver Tool #2: Realistic Expectations
- Caregiver Tool #3: Defining Your Role
- Caregiver Tool #4: Resources
 - Basic Education
 - Assembling the Treatment Team and Support Network
 - Community resources
 - Paying for treatment
 - Legal considerations
- Caregiver Tool #5: Effective Communication
- Caregiver Tool #6: A Family Action Plan



Self-Care Strategies



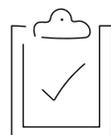
Defining Your Role



Realistic Expectations



Effective Communication



Resources



A Family Action Plan

Additional Resources

Visit the FFDA website at www.familyaware.org for additional tips and resources. The following organizations offer information and depression and related topics. Families for Depression Awareness assumes no responsibility for the content or accuracy of the information other organizations provide.

Help in a Crisis

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

800-273-8255

Crisis Text Line

Text HOME to 741741

Or urgently call your or your loved one's mental healthcare provider, go to a nearby hospital, or call 9-1-1.

Finding Local Resources

Call or text 2-1-1 or visit 211.org to find local resources.

Other Organizations

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

<https://www.afsp.org>

Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA)

800-826-3642, <https://www.dbsalliance.org>

Mental Health America (MHA)

703-684-7722, <https://mhanational.org/>

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)

800-950-6264, <https://www.nami.org>






Families for
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