



## Preserving Caregivers on the Front Lines

Caregiving for a Veteran loved one is a responsibility that challenges your physical, emotional, and mental wellbeing. Whether it is constant vigilance or intermittent attention to the needs of your loved one, your attention to yourself is often compromised. It is this loss of attention to yourself that places your wellness at risk.

### How can you return your attention to your own needs to preserve your wellbeing?

- **Seek Understanding** - There is a tremendous need for understanding when you are struggling as a Caregiver. Healing can come from simply being understood. There is relief that can come by sharing with another who understands or simply recognizes and validates it for you.
- **Identify Your Need** - When seeking understanding, what are you looking for? Do you seek someone to appreciate what you are going through? Do you seek comfort or support? Are you seeking to let go of control or give up being in charge? Are you looking for validation that you have reason to be upset or burned out?
- **Barriers to Paying Attention to You** – Do you find yourself thinking that you have no right to complain, that your suffering or upset doesn't compare to others, that you don't deserve to be upset when your loved one has had so much to cope with, or there is no time or space to notice because you are rushing from one thing to the next? Maybe you believe no one will understand or care.
- **Remove Barriers by Seeking and Building Support** - Continue to expand your options for where you can find support by building a diverse and flexible support network that can respond in different and unique ways to your needs. Make a list of these supports to remind you when the stress feeling overwhelming.
- **Daily Check In** - Make a daily practice of checking in with yourself to attend to your feelings and needs.
- **The Pleasure of our Senses** - Making the time to appreciate the sights, sounds, tastes, smells and touch that we are privileged to enjoy can offer us tremendous comfort and pleasure and a momentary respite from our struggles. Simply bringing our attention to what we appreciate and letting that attention rest there for a moment can feel like a soothing balm.
- **Attending to our Physical Health** - Attending regular medical appointments, shifting some eating to healthier choices, simple stretching or brief walks can reinforce that we matter and can make a positive impact on our overall wellbeing.



- **The Wisdom of Acceptance** - Becoming aware when we are pushing with all our might to control something is a risk. Watch for this pushing energy, this resistance to what is, and consider whether a breath of acceptance might be a wise alternative.
- **Attention to your Breath** - Surprisingly one very powerful tool in our coping tool kit may simply be to notice to breathe in, to slow down, and simply take a breath.

### **Mindfulness Meditation**

I will ask that you are seated in a comfortable position with your body supported and your legs uncrossed. Place your feet on the floor, and rest your hands in your lap or on your thighs. If you are able, close your eyes if you would like to bring your attention away from distractions. Keep your mouth gently closed, not clenched, and let your tongue lightly touch the roof of your mouth. Breathe through your nose, unless for some reason you aren't able. When you are settled in, we will start by taking a few deep breaths and then exhale slowly. Breathe in deeply and exhale slowly.

Now, without trying to control your breath in any way, allow it to find its natural rhythm and depth. Bring your attention to the rising and falling of your belly as you breathe. You are just featuring your breath as a focus of attention. You don't have to do anything fancy just pay attention to your breath. It knows what do all on its own. You don't have to force it or control it in anyway, just follow your breath lovingly and with attention, in and out. If it rests between breaths, relax and trust that it will resume. There are no expectations, no worries, you don't have to do it perfectly, you are just noticing and following our breath.

You may notice your mind wandering or find your thoughts may float through, distracting your attention to the focus on your breath. This will happen. This is what our thoughts will do. Maybe you are thinking of what you have to do next, maybe you are restless. It's okay. Your thoughts, like the waves in the ocean, will rise and pass. Just guide your attention back to featuring the awareness of your breath

Drop into the place of calm and quiet that is there beneath the surface of the ocean waves. There is a place of rest and calm for you beneath the surface. Give yourself over to the quiet awareness of this moment; the quiet that is found in focusing on your breath.

You may return again and again, if you wish, to this place of restoration. You may return again and again as a kind and gentle act of self-love.