



Stepping into Stillness: Maintaining Your Center of Gravity When Caring for a Veteran Loved One Handout

Your wellbeing is affected by the strains of caregiving. It is important to pay attention to yourself as you also care for your loved one. Listen to and care for your body, mind and emotions. If you pay attention to yourself, you can protect your health and wellbeing. Here are some things to think about.

How has the care of your Veteran affected you?

- **Physical**-Have you lost sleep or had disrupted sleep? Have you missed medical appointments? Have you noticed muscle strain? Have you ignored exercise? Have you developed poor eating habits?
- **Mental**-Have you become forgetful, or troubled with worry? Have you become confused or less organized?
- **Emotional**-Do you feel more cross or anxious? Do you notice feeling lonely or angry, sad or depressed?

Why is it so important to pay attention to yourself? If you don't, it's like driving a car with your eyes closed. How far might you go before getting in a crash? You may lose sight of your own needs when you scramble to meet the needs of another. Attention to yourself and the present moment keeps you from crashing. It can help keep you calmly at the center of your own life.

Your physical needs are important. Your mental and emotional needs matter too.

- **Physical** – See your doctor. Take a daily walk.
- **Mental** – Make lists and organize tasks.
- **Emotional** – Share your feelings in a journal or with a friend.

Practice paying attention to you. People who meditate feel calmer. They feel a greater sense of well-being. Scientists accept these results as real. It is easy to begin. Sit quietly and try to stay in the present moment. Focus on the rise and fall of your breathing. Practice feeling caring thoughts for yourself. Try different types of meditation, or simply sit still and see what happens for you!

Communicate to Support Self Care. When your loved one is ill, communication needs even more attention and care. When you notice how you feel, what you think or



need, you may communicate your needs more clearly. Take a deep breath and consider:

- What feelings do you need to discuss?
- How might you express them? Who might listen?
- What thoughts do you need to share?
- How might you ask for help?

Learn to accept the present moment. You face many losses as a caregiver. Both you and your loved one face many changes and challenges. You may feel uncertain, or less in control. You may have lost roles, dreams, and cherished plans. It's understandable to fight these losses. But fighting often brings more suffering. The way out of this fight is through the practice of acceptance. This is different than giving up. It is giving into what is and staying present to what life offers in this moment.

- Notice when your fight for control is causing you greater suffering.
- What helps you to come to acceptance?

Live the life that is given. Enjoyment of life comes easier with acceptance. Notice the activities and interests you have not lost. Embrace the connections and supports that you have now.

- What sparks your desire for living?
- Who do you spend time with that energizes and supports you?