



Negotiating the Emotional Milestones of Aging, Illness, and Caregiving Handout

There is a large and growing population of individuals 50 years and over that share the demanding and complex experience of aging and caregiving. Not only are the vast majority of caregivers facing the multifaceted realities of aging, but you may also be contending with the complex emotions and losses inherent in the caregiving role.

Recognition Rather than Resistance

Aging, illness, and caregiving can present you with a host of emotional challenges and opportunities in which you may face difficult and painful emotions. Working through the changes that you are facing requires recognition and attention to how you feel and what you are experiencing. Resisting, ignoring, or fighting the changes or the feelings that accompany them will only result in greater suffering. If you are able to pay attention to and honor these feelings, without clinging to them, they will in fact pass.

- What are some of the emotions or emotional experiences that you have been ignoring or resisting? (sadness and loss, anger and frustration, anxiety and worry, isolation and loneliness)
- One way to pay attention to your feelings, to notice, honor and allow them to pass without clinging to them is with a practice called mindfulness meditation. Mindfulness is simply a practice of focusing your attention in the present moment with an attitude of non-judgement or kind compassion. Mindfulness and focused breathing can bring the experience of calm.

Reflection: Breathing into Acceptance

If there is sadness
Breathe into your sadness
Allow your breath to release the tears
Let them cleanse your heartache like a spring rain

If there is anger
Breathe into your anger
Let your breath cool the heat of your angry fire
Empowering you towards sound and purposeful action

If there is worry and anxiety
Breathe into your worry and anxiety
Let your breath slowly smooth the tangles of control
Rocking you gently in the tranquil boat of acceptance

If there is restlessness and boredom



Breathe into your restlessness and boredom
Let your breath find a channel for your energy
Exhaling energy towards an avenue of interest

If you feel trapped or stuck
Breathe into feeling trapped and stuck
Let your breath awaken a new perspective
Finding a pocket of freedom and choice

If there is embarrassment
Breathe into your embarrassment
Let your breath lighten your self-consciousness
Finding humor and humility in its wake

If there is fear
Breathe into your fear
Allow your breath to soothe your fears
Deep in the breath of your belly, there is safety

If there is loneliness and isolation
Breathe into your loneliness and isolation
Your breath is a shared river in the sea of humanity
You are not alone. Reach out!

Acceptance- Coming to some acceptance doesn't mean that you have to be happy about what is happening, it just means you are no longer fighting it. When there is a lack of acceptance, suffering increases and you may feel stuck, either backed into a corner or repetitively running into the same brick walls. As you move into acceptance the pain caused by not letting go of the feeling or experience is released, opening your perspective, and a new outlook arrives.

- What feelings or experiences are you struggling with that would benefit by letting go and accepting them as they are?

Engagement- It is investing and engaging in the present moment that provides direction forward. In the words of author Dr. Irving Yalom, "One must immerse oneself in the river of life." If one is to find meaning and joy in living beyond whatever limitations that aging, illness and caregiving may impose, you must invest and engage in living. There are many small and large ways that you may engage and invest in living. Let your imagination and instincts guide you.

- How can you invest in living today? What interest can you explore? Whom can you reach out to? What can you appreciate? How might you find joy today?