



## Preserving Caregivers on the Front Lines Handout

Caregiving for a Veteran loved one is a responsibility that challenges your physical, emotional, and mental wellbeing. The role of caregiver shifts your attention outside of yourself toward the person you care for. Whether it is constant vigilance, or intermittent attention to the needs of your loved one, your attention to yourself is compromised. It is this loss of attention to yourself that places you at risk.

### How can you return your attention back to you, in order 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 simply understands.
- **Identifying what you need**-When seeking understanding what are you looking for? Do you need someone to appreciate and validate your distress? Is it comfort, support, or the burden of your duties and emotional stresses to be lifted? Do you want to let go of control or give up being in charge?
- **Barriers to self-attention**-such as: thinking you have no right to complain, that your suffering doesn't compare to others, you don't deserve to be upset when your loved one has had so much to cope with, you don't have time to pay attention to yourself, you believe no one will understand or care, or you may think "what's the point of letting myself get upset it won't change anything anyway"
- **Remove barriers by seeking and building support**- Continue to expand your options for where you can find support, build a diverse varied 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 stress interferes to recognize you are not alone.
- **Daily check in**-Make a daily practice of checking in with yourself to attend to your feelings and needs
- **Enjoy the pleasure of your senses**- Make the time to appreciate the sights, sounds, tastes, smells and touch that you are privileged to enjoy. The senses can offer tremendous comfort and pleasure and a momentary respite from your struggles. Simply bringing your attention to what you appreciate, and letting that attention rest there for a moment, can in fact feel like a soothing balm.
- **Attending to your physical health**- Attend regular medical appointments, shift-eating habits to healthier choices, simple stretching or brief walks can reinforce that you matter and can make a positive impact on our overall wellbeing.



- **The wisdom of acceptance**-Become aware when you are pushing with all your might to control something. Consider if you are pushing against something you can, or can't change? Would a breath of acceptance be a wiser alternative?
- **Attention to your breath**- surprisingly one very powerful tool in your coping tool kit may simply be to notice to breathe in, to slow down and simply take a breath.

## **Mindfulness Meditation**

Be 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 laps 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 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, and no worries to do it perfectly. You are just noticing and following our breath.

You may notice your mind wandering or find your thoughts or feelings floating through, distracting your attention to the focus on your breath. This will happen. This is what your thoughts and feelings will do. You may be thinking of what you have to do next. You might be restless. It's ok. Your thoughts are like the waves in the ocean. They will rise and pass. Just guide your attention back to featuring the awareness of your breath rising and falling.

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



VA Caregiver Support Line 1-855-260-3274