



Standing on Solid Ground: Finding your Path Along the Challenging Road of Caregiving and Mental Illness

Seek Knowledge

- Learn about the symptoms, the triggers, the patterns, or course of the illness, and the treatment options available. This is a powerful tool you can invest in to help you find solid ground.
- Learning about the illness can help you distinguish the person from their illness
- Learn how the illness affect your loved one as this can help you be less reactive, unprepared, and taken off guard, when the symptoms are impacting you and your loved ones wellbeing.
- Getting the facts can help you to distinguish how you might help support your love one and clarify what your loved one is capable of managing. Knowledge can help you to tailor your approach to caring that supports their independence.

What are the symptoms, triggers, and patterns that are evident in your loved ones illness?

Where might you turn to gain more knowledge? (For example; National Alliance on Mental Illness-NAMI, Alzheimer's Association, VA PTSD Information Line, VA Health Providers, AA, Alanon, internet, library)

Attend to Your Emotions

- Pay attention to your emotions as they can profoundly impact your thoughts, reactions, health and wellbeing
- Your emotions are a powerful source of information. Your emotions can act as a barometer of how you are doing, how stressed you may be, and as a result provide direction for what it is you may need.
- Your emotions can alert you to the limits you need to set, and can provide guidance regarding how you need to care for yourself.
- Your emotions can provide direction and can help you to be more purposeful and less reactive.

What emotions have you been ignoring and how can you take care of them?



Identify Responsibility

- It takes practice to sort out what are your responsibilities and what belongs to your loved one, especially when their illness compromises their abilities. It takes knowledge of the illness, and clear information about what you can reasonably expect given your loved ones illness. It is important to support independence and not take responsibility when your loved one is capable of their own care and choices. Being a support may require learning to let go and accept what you have no control over. These skills will help you to remain steady.

How do you know what are your responsibilities and what are your loved ones?

Sharing Your Experience

- Communicating your thoughts and feelings may not change the illness, but it does have great potential in changing you. When you communicate, and keep the focus on you, your feelings, your needs, and your requests, you are both reinforcing that you matter, and are creating a bridge of understanding between yourself and others.

What have you been keeping silent about that you need to share?

Finding Support

- Communicating directly with others will positively influence how connected you feel in your journey and how solid you feel in yourself. Think of a time that you shared openly with another, whether sharing an upset with a friend, communicating a clear limit, making a request directly, or asking directly for help, and remember the feeling or relief, connection, or support that came with it.

Who can you turn to for connection?

Who might you add to your list of connections? (VA Caregiver Support Line, The Care Support Coordinator, VA staff, National Alliance Mental Illness,(NAMI support groups), a counselor, Alzheimer's Assoc., VA PTSD Line, Veterans Crisis Line, Alcoholics Anonymous, Alanon. The list is as endless as your imagination!