



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

When exploring the many challenges of caring for a loved one, it is important to recognize the potential impacts on the caregivers physical, mental, and emotional functioning and wellbeing.

How has the care of your Veteran impacted these areas of functioning for you?

- **Physical** –Have you: lost sleep or had disrupted sleep, not attended to medical appointments, experienced muscle strains, ignored exercise, or developed poor eating habits
- **Mental** –Have you: become forgetful, or troubled with worry, become confused or disorganized
- **Emotional** –Have you: become more irritable, anxious, lonely, angry, sad or depressed

Attention to yourself and to the present moment can be lost when you are scrambling to meet the needs of another, or struggling to meet the demands of your daily life. 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? Attention to yourself and the present moment not only keeps you from crashing, it can help keep you calmly at the center of your own life.

What are the physical, mental, or emotional needs which you would like to pay greater attention?

- **Physical** – such as making a doctor's appointment for you or take a daily walk
- **Mental** – such as make lists and organize tasks
- **Emotional** – such as sharing your feelings with another, writing in a journal

Practice paying attention to you. Science and medical research have recognized the powerful benefits of meditation to health and wellbeing. Meditation is a practice, and is no more complex than sitting still and bringing attention and awareness to the present moment, with an attitude of non-judgment or compassion. One very simple way to practice meditation is to simply focus on the rise and fall of your breathing. Explore for yourself a meditation practice, or simply sit still and see what happens for you!



Communicate to Support Self Care. Communication is a skill that presents us all with a host of challenges and when your loved one is ill, it demands even more attention and care. If you are paying attention to how you feel, what you think or need, you may then be able to more clearly communicate your needs to others. Take a deep breath and consider:

- What feelings are you aware of that you need to express?
- Who might you express your feelings to or how might you express them?
- What thoughts have you recognized need to be shared?
- What request for help would you risk making?

Find Acceptance. Maybe it is recognition of the loss of control of physical, mental, or emotional functioning of your loved one that is so difficult to experience. Maybe it is uncertainty, the loss of roles, of dreams, of future plans, or the loss of control. Fighting the reality of these losses will merely bring with it more suffering for both of you. The way out of this fight is through the practice of coming to acceptance. This is different than giving up. It is giving into what is, and remaining present to what life is offering in this moment.

- When are you aware that your fight for control is causing you suffering?
- What helps you to come to acceptance?

Live the life that is given. Being present and enjoying the gifts of life is possible when you have come to acceptance with what is the current reality. Identify the activities, interests, connections and supports, not that you have lost, but that you have now.

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