



## **Beyond the Blues: Coping with Caregiver Depression Handout**

Are you a caregiver that is carrying the heavy weight of depression? You may have spent so much time and energy focusing on caring for your loved one that you haven't even considered how you are feeling. This presentation hopes to provide you with the opportunity to explore your own wellbeing. We hope to help you notice symptoms of depression and the consequences of not caring for these symptoms if they arise in you.

### **What are the symptoms of Depressive Illness?**

Intermittent sadness is a normal part of life, so how do you determine when you have crossed into clinical depression? While feeling sad, moody, or frustrated for short periods of time is a normal part of life, depression on the other hand is a physical illness with certain symptoms that occur consistently for at least a two-week period of time. If left untreated, a depressive episode can last months or even years. Depression impacts your mood, thinking, and can also contribute to changes in your physical body.

#### **Symptoms may include:**

- Lack of interest or pleasure in activities you once enjoyed
- Sleep disruption: unable to fall asleep, stay asleep, or sleeping too much
- Changes in eating habits, eating less or more
- Fatigue or loss of energy
- Negative thoughts of worthlessness, guilt, and sadness
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions
- Reoccurring thoughts of death, or suicidal thoughts or planning

### **What causes Depressive Illness?**

- Changes in the function of chemicals in the brain
- Family history
- Facing a trauma, loss of a loved one, or other stressful situations
- Hormonal imbalances related to a medical condition
- Some health issues and medications



## **What can you do to treat Depressive Illness?**

Depression can make it hard to do the very things you need to do in order to feel well. You will need to balance being gentle with what you expect of yourself. In order to get well you will also need to encourage yourself to do things even when you don't feel like it.

- Pay closer attention to your thoughts and feelings
- Speak up, set limits, and take care of your needs
- Set up small rituals, routines, or daily practices to take a few moments to reflect on yourself
- Take a break from the demands and do something you enjoy
- Treat yourself with kindness and compassion
- Talk with your Doctor and see if medicine might be an option
- Reach out for support and connect with others
- Seek out a counselor
- Make sure that you are eating regular meals with healthy foods
- Follow the guidance for good sleep hygiene
- Daily movement or exercise
- Get outside and enjoy the sunlight
- Having a daily structure or plan and break down tasks to manageable steps
- Be aware of your negative thoughts; work to interrupt them
- Reach out for help with any thoughts of suicide (call 988, open 24hrs day)
- Engage in hobbies and activities you enjoy
- Practice being mindful

**Reach out to the VA Caregiver Support Line. Our Licensed Social Workers can assist you in finding a path forward “Beyond the Blues!”**