

Building Resilience and Avoiding Burnout for Caregivers



As a caregiver, it can be easy to prioritize others' needs before your own. Caregiving can be rewarding, but it can also be tiring, overwhelming, and stressful. You are committed to supporting and assisting your loved ones, often becoming emotionally invested in their health and well-being. Consequently, this can have a negative effect on your mental health and can even lead to burnout.

Burnout is a reaction to prolonged stress characterized by emotional, mental, and physical exhaustion. It can also lead to emotional distancing and feelings of shame. In fact, formal or informal caregivers are at a greater risk of burnout when caring for someone who is experiencing a mental illness or mental health issues. However, you can help avoid burnout by building your personal resilience.

Resilience is more than just the ability to “bounce back”, it is effectively working through and learning from adversity. Building resilience requires protecting your well-being, particularly during difficult times. This, in turn, can help you continue to support others and become a better caregiver. While there are many ways you can learn to build resilience and avoid burnout, below are several strategies to help you get started.

1. Develop Healthy Coping Mechanisms

Identifying and practicing healthy coping mechanisms can promote emotional well-being and mental strength, helping you to effectively manage stress and adversity. It is important to note that coping mechanisms should never involve suppressing or hiding your emotions, as this can lead to burnout. It is vital to find a safe and productive outlet for negative feelings. This can include:

- **Exercise:** Going for a walk, playing a sport, or taking an exercise class can help to release negative emotions and stress.
- **Journaling:** Simply writing your emotions down, whether positive and negative, can help you process and release them.
- **Practicing Mindfulness:** Being present and acknowledging your physical sensations and emotions in the moment is an easy way to practice mindfulness throughout the day, at any time.
- **Engaging in Hobbies:** Doing things that bring you joy and relaxation can help boost your mood and improve overall well-being.
- **Seeking Therapy:** The demands of being a caregiver can be overwhelming, so it is important to reach out for professional help if you are having trouble practicing healthy coping mechanisms on your own.

Building Resilience and Avoiding Burnout for Caregivers



2. Give Yourself Compassion

As a caregiver, you feel compassion and use this to respond to the needs of those you are caring for, even when your own emotional reserves are depleted. It is important to remember that you need to be compassionate with yourself as well. Caregivers cannot be at their best everyday – no one can. Acknowledge that you are only human, and it is okay to make mistakes. Being compassionate with yourself can make it easier to work through adversity, building your resilience.

3. Seek Meaningful Connections

Having a support network where you can practice open and honest communication promotes a sense of belonging and understanding. Reach out to loved ones, join a support group, or chat with other caregivers for connection and support. Sharing your experiences with others can help you feel heard and prevent burnout. If you need support, we invite you to check out our list of [Help & Community Resources](#).

4. Know What You Can and Can't Control

Letting go and embracing uncertainty can be daunting. There will always be circumstances beyond your control, but recognizing what you can control allows you to focus your energy and resources towards overcoming obstacles and finding solutions. You are in control of your choices, reactions, and decisions. This is known as your “sphere of influence”. Knowing this builds a solid foundation to face adversity head-on, strengthening your resilience.

5. Nurture Self-Confidence

To successfully build resilience, you need to believe in your ability to overcome obstacles and trust that you have the strength to persevere through adversity. Nurture your self-confidence by celebrating your wins – no matter how small, take the time to acknowledge your strengths, and reframe your mindset to see setbacks or mistakes as valuable learning experiences. Make sure that the expectations you are setting for yourself are realistic and achievable.

6. Embrace Your Core Character Values

Your character can be defined as the values and principles that guide your decisions and actions, especially in difficult situations. Examples include honesty, kindness, integrity, humor, innovation, and community to name a few. Everyone has a different set of core values. Take some time to reflect and determine your top 3-5 core character values. When navigating adversity, think back to these values and ensure your actions align with them. This helps maintain resiliency as you should feel confident about your actions and decisions if they align with your character.

Building Resilience and Avoiding Burnout for Caregivers



Access Caregiver Resources

Take advantage of accessible resources designed specifically for caregivers. Stigma-Free Mental Health Society provides a diverse range of no-cost resources for caregivers, including parents and guardians:

- Our Student Mental Health Toolkit contains **Resources For Parents, Guardians, and Caregivers** that offer guidance on supporting your child and your own mental well-being. You can find resources such as conversation cards about mental health, external videos and links, and a comprehensive Parent Resource Guide on how to get your child help when they need it.

When looking to build your resiliency to avoid caregiver burnout, think of the 6 C's: Coping, Compassion, Connections, Control, Confidence, and Character. We also invite you to learn more about our **programs** and how you can implement them to support you in your caregiving journey. Caregiving is a rewarding yet challenging endeavour, so it is important to give yourself the same care and attention that you provide to others. We hope this resource can help you prioritize your well-being. Know that you are not alone, and there is a community of individuals who are navigating the same journey.

References

Canadian Mental Health Association. (2018, August 30). Care for the caregiver. CMHA National. <https://cmha.ca/brochure/care-for-the-caregiver/>

Cousineau, T.M., Hobbs, L.M., & Arthur, K.C. (2019). The Role of Compassion and Mindfulness in Building Parental Resilience When Caring for Children With Chronic Conditions: A Conceptual Model. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 1602(10). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.01602>

Gerain, P., & Zech, E. (2018). Does Informal Caregiving Lead to Parental Burnout? Comparing Parents Having (or Not) Children With Mental and Physical Issues. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 884(9). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.00884>

Naluri. (n.d.). Thriving Through Challenges: A Guide to the 7 C's of Resilience. Naluri Therapeutics. <https://www.naluri.life/community/articles/thriving-through-challenges-a-guide-to-the-7-cs-of-resilience>

Ottawa Public Health; Canadian Mental Health Association; Canadian Public Health Association; Mental Illness Caregivers Association; Military Family Services (2016). Mental Health Caregiver Guide: A guide for caregivers of persons living with mental illness or experiencing mental health challenges. https://www.ottawapublichealth.ca/en/public-health-topics/resources/Documents/mental_health_caregiver_guide_en.pdf