

## **What is Self Care\***

Self care has been defined as “the right and responsibility to take care of your physical, emotional and spiritual well-being” (Salvucci, 2001). Self care may also be thought of as anything that contributes to our emotional, spiritual, physical, and/or social rejuvenation, enabling us to create balance in our lives while providing care for our family member or friend with a mental illness.

## **What can stop us from expressing our needs and caring for ourselves?**

### **Discomfort**

- You may feel awkward or uncomfortable in asking for what you want.
- In stating your need, you become vulnerable to the possibility that the listener may say no.

### **Fear of being selfish**

- You may be uncertain if your request is “reasonable.” You may convince yourself that your needs are somehow less important than those of your family member.
- You may be tempted to give all of your energy (resources, time, money, etc.) to the family member. In so doing, you can lose yourself, and that strategy will eventually backfire. You may even forget that you have personal needs that you are neglecting.

## **Guilt can drive you to ignore your own needs**

The consequences of ignoring your own needs over time usually are anger and resentment.

These emotions can be expressed in one or more of the following manners

- Displaced onto the children, co-workers, other family members, the family dog, etc.
- Directly expressed to your ill relative
- Passive-aggressively expressed to the family member you are struggling with (e.g., coming home late with no explanation; making meals that you know he/she dislikes)
- Turned inward on your self, which can result in depression or self-destructive behaviour



## Step 2: Drafting a self-care plan

Your self-care plan can be developed by

- *Continuing to do...* those things that you are already doing that rejuvenate you and positively contribute to your health and quality of life.
- *Start doing...* new activities or accessing services that will enable you to recharge and achieve better balance in your life.
- *Stop doing...* those things which are optional and add to your current responsibilities and stresses, and/or those things for which you can enlist the help of others to lighten your load.

Take a few minutes and identify activities and lifestyle choices that can help you improve your emotional, spiritual, physical, social, and intellectual aspects of life. Also note those responsibilities and stresses which you can stop doing on your own or altogether.

	<b>Continue Doing</b>	<b>Start Doing</b>	<b>Stop Doing</b>
<i>Emotional</i>			
<i>Spiritual</i>			
<i>Physical</i>			
<i>Social</i>			
<i>Intellectual</i>			

## Strengthening Families Together—Episode 5: Coping as a Family Part Two

The following are some suggestions that other caregivers have included in their self-care plan:

### *Emotional*

- Participate in a caregiver self-help group or one-on-one peer support with another caregiver for practical information-sharing and emotional support
- Seek emotional support for yourself from family and friends and/or from professional counsellors

### *Spiritual*

- Take time for regular spiritual rituals that are important to you (e.g., meditation, attending organized religious services)
- Take time to enjoy nature

### *Physical*

- Maintain good nutrition
- Exercise regularly
- Seek services to relieve you of some physical caregiving tasks (e.g., home and yard maintenance and cleaning services)

### *Social*

- Take time to maintain regular contact with other family members and friends to maintain these important relationships
- Take time for regular participation in your favourite recreational activities

### *Intellectual*

- “Knowledge is power” – Seek out information about mental illness, available resources, etc., so that you are well-equipped to deal with the challenges of supporting someone living with a mental illness

Obviously, this is not an exhaustive list, so think creatively about your own situation and what would make a difference for you.

\*Source: MS Society of Canada Taking Care: A Travel Guide for Your MS Caregiver Journey

=Source: SAFE Program, Oklahoma City Veterans Affairs Medical Center 260