The Penn Memory Center's Caring for the Caregiver Class

A six-week psychoeducational course

Class Facilitator:

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Office Hours: Wednesdays March 10 – April 21
from 4:00 – 5:00pm

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Introduction

Session-by-Session Overview

Class 1 is an introduction to the program and to one another. We will talk about memory loss, dementia, caregiver burden, and the importance of caregiver self-care. We will also teach you the first of our relaxation techniques, the Signal Breath.

Class 2 will equip you to notice how negative thought patterns happen automatically and are unhelpful. We will identify cognitive distortions and learn how to challenge or change maladaptive thoughts. We will introduce you to another relaxation technique, 20 Breaths.

Class 3 will start by exploring the importance of caregiver self-care. We'll focus on recognizing the self-care you may already be engaging in while also brainstorming ways to increase your well-being. We'll then learn basic communication techniques that will help to improve communication with your relative, and serve as a building block for all of your other caregiving skills. We will practice a body scan relaxation technique.

Class 4 will identify undesirable behavioral symptoms that you wish to change. These can be the behaviors of your loved one, or your own behaviors. The ability to alter a behavior can improve your mood and feelings. We will practice a relaxation technique using music.

Class 5 will explain the importance of engaging your relative in meaningful activities. We'll learn to identify methods to adapt activities your relative used to engage in, to brainstorm new activity ideas, and to introduce an activity in the most successful way.

Class 6 will provide an overview of care planning and an explanation of community resources for caregivers. We will also discuss effective methods for engaging others in your relative's care.

Class 7 will be an opportunity to reflect, ask questions, and have a closing ceremony.

Mindfulness: The awareness that emerges when you are paying attention, on purpose, to the present moment, without judgment.

"Your mind is like a kindergarden class, and meditating is like trying to get your thoughts to take a nap. If one wakes up, tell them gently to go back to sleep. If your mind thinks, 'but you have a to-do list!' just say, 'shhhh.' (Cup of Jo)
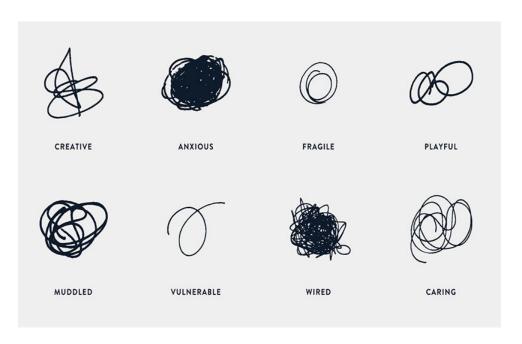
Relaxation Exercise: The Signal Breath

The signal breath is a simple stress management technique that can help you cope better when stressful caregiving situations arise. It is very powerful because you can use it **anywhere,** at **any time,** during **any situation.**

Mood-Monitoring: Becoming Aware of Your Moods

Checking in with Yourself: As we begin to learn new skills to improve your mood, it's important to check in with yourself. For our purposes, "checking in" means asking yourself, "how do I feel right now?" or "how am I feeling today?" If you're not sure how you're feeling, can you identify any feelings in your body? As you check in regularly, you'll be able to identify the various mood changes you experience throughout a day, week, or month.

Mood Monitoring: Monitoring your mood, by keeping a daily record of your feelings, will help you understand yourself better. The daily record will allow you to identify whether your mood follows a particular pattern. For example, some people feel great on Friday after work, and feel horrible on Sunday evening. The daily record will help you figure out whether there are certain times when you feel better or worse than others.

CREATIVE   ANXIOUS   FRAGILE   PLAYFUL

MUDDLED   VULNERABLE   WIRED   CARING

Activity: Practice Recording Your Daily Mood

Using the 10 point scale, give your mood an average rating for the day where 1 is very sad, 5 is "so-so," and 10 is very happy.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
			X						

Next, in the column next to your mood rating for each day, please briefly give two major reasons explaining your feelings for that particular mood. Try to be as specific as possible.

Date	Mood Score	Why I Think I Felt This Way

Homework: complete your mood rating form for the week, and try using the signal breath 3 times.