

SELF-CARE ISSUES FOR CAREGIVERS & OTHER SERVANTS

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1. Be aware & manage your own grief and stress. Recognize that you had not planned to care “in isolation” from other people—and that contact, study, and communication are all reshaped and re-scripted because of this epidemic. Acknowledge your own dejection> find a way to share it (below)
2. A Different Compassion Fatigue: We are spending more time than ever in a different mode of communication—so note the three most common “caregiver” responses to overextension: **depression, hypersensitivity, compulsivity**. Remember that religious models we respect took time off (Gandhi, Moses, Jesus Christ, etc). Find ways to keep the emotional baggage in one room. Protect your spouse, family. How? A. Talk it out (with a colleague), B. Work it out (exercise), C. Write it out (reflection/prayer) (see below)
2. Limitations: Learn to regularly set limits and boundaries for yourself, for those you love; *don't expect them to understand how you feel*. Boundaries remind us and reassure others that we will not abuse them/us. Learn to “dump” your anger/frustration/helplessness in one of several “safe” venues (below)
3. Expectations: Evaluate your "self-script" periodically: What are you requiring of yourself? Expectations are often unrealistic--but we have taught ourselves to believe several myths. (“I’m not sure I can do care this way...” “I bet everybody else is managing this better than I am...” Listen to the ways you are “putting yourself down” – with negative self-talk. What are *you* most anxious about?
4. Rest: Establish blocks of time which you reserve for family and recovery, and guard them faithfully. Take breaks from talking, texting, and working at a desk; know your own signals for burnout and fatigue (irritability, lack of concentration, loss of appetite, loss of interest, anxiety/panic, restlessness, anger/resentment, paralyzing stress, depression, emotional flight, etc.).
5. Share: Join or create a small group of “virtual” kindred spirits with whom you may regularly share your frustrations, struggles, and sadness--as well as celebrations & joys. Schedule a support system into your life! (find a common time to conference call with at least three “safe people”<Jesus texted Lazarus and Mary in Bethany every day... 😊.>
- 6 Routine: Schedule two or three activities into your schedule that take you away from your pressure, and also give you peace: Supply yourself some joy, so you'll have some to give (reading for relaxation? Indoor project--physical? Playing a game with a friend/family? A funny movie? Taking a walk?)
7. Prayer/Meditation: Use moments for validation of feelings, perspective, relaxation; take a few minutes twice a day to voice your struggles. Ask for what you need, and *complain creatively* (the psalmist did)
8. Journaling & Listening to Your Life: Write down how you feel, like many psalmists did; share a personal concern or worry - for you alone to read. Get past superficial issues & express your anxiety and fears. Express your caring anger. God got angry over things that mattered.
9. Expect: “spiritual deserts” and “seasons of “self-doubt”. Acknowledge dispassion and emptiness as recurring and normal events (Elijah was depressed in a cave, too). If it persists, see a counselor.
10. Exercise: The body absorbs stress in many ways, and needs renewal through stimulation, use, and "discharging." Find your way to "engage" your temple--and reduce emotional/spiritual fatigue
11. Remember that we are all “learning as we go” in this mysterious challenge; pace yourself. Read the Scriptures a different way: reflectively, absorbingly.... Note its many crises—and God’s care.

THE DAILY PRACTICE OF SELF-CARE

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1. Become intentional about taking time to rest. No one else knows your burden—don't wait for someone else to give you permission to take space, recover
2. Schedule time with yourself for reflection. Protect it.
3. Schedule time with family. Protect it: a "commitment"
4. Listen to your *negative* self-script regularly. It's contagious. Challenge it
5. Leave your work/routine/get away—break the pattern
6. Listen for signs of fatigue: irritability, lack of focus, etc.
7. Schedule some laughter, play, distraction time
8. Exercise. It's a stress buster
9. Give yourself permission to doubt/not care/rest/stop/leave things undone
10. ASK: How much of what I'm hearing is MY responsibility?
11. Remember: I neither control, change, nor fix others
12. "I am not the whole issue..."
13. What is urgent—and where is the urgency coming from?
14. Why am I anxious? Identify—it will reduce its size
15. Don't respond to an issue immediately: reflect/act
16. Accept what is not in your control to affect
17. Quit trying to undo yesterday. It's done—and forgiven—by God
18. "How much of what I'm doing is to buy acceptance?"
19. Watch for compliance/hostility/rebellion
20. Understand that selection means rejection (for now)
21. Believe that some important things cost pain/time
22. What is most difficult for me to ask for?
23. Not everyone will like what I choose
24. Not everyone will understand what I do—now
25. To care for oneself is not the same as being selfish
26. There is a difference between hurting and harming
27. Blame, guilt, and forgiveness can be weapons of power
28. Corporate actions and "behaviors" are not always redemptive

Resources: Dan Bagby, *Healing Our Hurts: Coping With Difficult Emotions*; Ronald Enroth, *Churches That Abuse*; M. L. Pulley, *Losing Your Job, Reclaiming Your Soul*; Lewis Smedes, *Forgive & Forget: Healing the Hurts We Don't Deserve*.