

Family Caregiving: Don't do it alone.

Information, Tips & Tools
for Family Caregivers



Family Caregivers
of British Columbia

— Let us help —

1-877-520-3267

Welcome

An African proverb says,

“If you want to go fast,
go alone. If you want
to go far, go together.”

Most of us are able to go fast from time to time. We can push the boundaries of our energy and burn the candle at both ends. Then once the urgency is over, we return to a more balanced way of life, at least until the next sprint is required. But what happens when your sprint turns into a marathon?

We’re at a time in history where most of us will take part in the marathon of caregiving. It’s not usually something we anticipate or sign up for or train for. Right now, over one million people in BC¹ – over a quarter of the population – care for a family member, friend or neighbour. Despite the monumental number, their compassion and commitment largely go unremarked, unrecognized and unsupported.

Who We Are

Family Caregivers of BC is a registered charity that serves family caregivers across the province with free emotional support, tools and resources, education, and engagement opportunities. We also liaise with health care organizations to improve recognition of, and services for, family caregivers. We believe in the power of personal networks and that asking for and accepting help is a sign of strength.

Our goal is to be the information hub for family caregivers in BC and to have caregivers like you recognized as partners in care in the health care system. We understand the vital role you play—most of our staff and volunteers have been caregivers too!

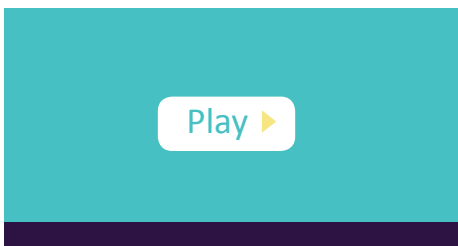
Why We Do What We Do

There are over 1 million family caregivers in this province who provide 80% of the care for their family members and friends. You are essential to the health care system, yet as you may have experienced, family caregivers go unnoticed. We want to make it easier for you to navigate the complicated health care system, communicate with health care professionals and your care recipient, set clear boundaries so you don’t burn out, and get the emotional support you need.

Even though caregiving is emotionally and physically demanding, even downright exhausting, it is one of the most rewarding gifts you can ever give to another person. If you want to maintain and enrich the gift of yourself in the marathon of caregiving, never run alone. You may be “fast” for a little while, but it’s the road to burnout.

Instead, plan to have a network of support by enlisting the help of your family, friends and community organizations. We’re ready to travel the distance with you.

Watch the Video



1. Statistics Canada. 2012. “Portrait of caregivers”. Catalogue no. 89-652-X — No. 001

Caregiver Stress & Unexpected Changes



“My Dad is 95 years old and honestly, some days I can’t believe he is still alive. I’m his only daughter and caregiver. I’ve been looking after him for 4 years now. In those years, we’ve had pneumonia, a broken hip and a stroke. What I’ve really learned is there are always unexpected challenges and stress. I kept thinking that if we got over the bump in the road, the caregiving would get easier, until I figured out that there would always be another bump in the road.”

Are you a healthy caregiver?

Caregiving isn’t easy. Family caregivers tell us they feel burnt out.

Experiencing some stress is a part of everyday life. When symptoms of stress persist, however, they can be harmful. Understanding how you feel is the first step to coping with stress. Some days it might feel like boot camp. Other days, you expect things to be hard and you breeze right through them. The bottom line: caregiving is unique to all families. It’s likely that you’ll experience changes in your relationships with spouses/partners siblings, children, and mostly, the person you’re caring for. You can also expect some strong feelings to surface.

Take 5 minutes (yes that’s how long it takes to complete the test [click here](#)) to check in with yourself. It is vital that you maintain your own health and well-being while caring for another. There are a number of things you can do to stay healthy, recharge and manage the stress that comes with caring for someone else. These actions will help you be an effective caregiver for a longer period of time. This test is totally anonymous.

Here are a few additional links on managing caregiver stress:

- ♥ [5 Ways to Stay Strong as a Caregiver](#)
- ♥ [The Work/Caregiving Balance](#)
- ♥ [Hints for Stress Reduction](#)

We can’t even see your results.

Caregivers also tell us they are surprised by the number of challenges they face or ones they didn’t expect. They also tell us they often feel alone in their journey.

You’re not alone in this. Family Caregivers of BC is here to help. We can help by providing emotional support and a roadmap to navigate the ins and outs of caregiving to help reduce stress.

Finding Balance when Caregiving

Finding ways to balance the demands of caring for another while taking care of your own physical, mental, social and emotional health is essential to making caregiving sustainable. Caregiving often gets squeezed into an already busy life, including the day-to-day responsibilities of family life, work, and maintaining a home. Many caregivers take on this new role without letting go of anything else and often end up exhausted, feeling overwhelmed and burnt out.²

Maintaining personal wellness is just as important as anything you do for someone else. Think of the possible effect of neglecting to take care of yourself on the person you are caring for. If you get sick, who will take care of the two of you? It is not selfish to focus on yourself. Make your personal health a priority.

“I’ve been caring for my husband with Parkinson’s Disease for over 7 years. He’s only 66 years old and we’ve been married for 40 years. It’s not easy to watch him decline but I also know that no matter what I do or don’t do, he will decline as the disease progresses. I’ve learned a lot of things along the way and one of the most important ones is to look after myself. Between my work, being out in nature, reading the FCBC Newsletter and e-news and traveling, I can find what I need to stay strong and to be able to care for my husband.”

Personal Exercise

Take a few minutes to complete this exercise. Divide a sheet of paper into two columns. On the left side make a list of all the people, activities, responsibilities and other things that drain your energy.

These include things that stress you out, frustrate you, worry you or anger you, and might include the barking dog next door, the bills that need to be paid or your chronically sore back. Remember to focus on all areas of your life, not just in your role as caregiver.

In the second column (on the right) list all the people, activities and things that energize you, things that you are passionate about, that interest you and that you enjoy doing. Include activities that you used to do, but might not take time to do anymore. These might include having coffee with friends, buying flowers or watching a funny movie.

When completed look at the two lists and consider the following:

- ♥ How might you reduce or change the draining impact of the items on the first list? It might mean letting go of expectations or asking for help.
- ♥ How can you include more of the items on the energizer list into your life? By choosing to be with the people who bring you energy or participating in activities that you enjoy, your life will be feel lighter, your energy will increase and you will be able to function more effectively in your caregiving role. You will be more patient, less frustrated and more able to set priorities and problem-solve.

Stress	Energy
Tom's Meds	Walking with the dog
Worry about the roof	Talks with Jane
Money concerns	Getting to the library/reading
Tom's depression	Going for coffee with Amelia
The future	Watching a Comedy Show

2. Turcotte, M. 2013. "Family caregiving: What are the consequences?" Insights on Canadian Society. Catalogue no. 75-006-X, September.

“Just as your car runs more smoothly and requires less energy to go faster and farther when the wheels are in perfect alignment, you perform better when your thoughts, feelings, emotions, goals, and values are in balance.” — Brian Tracy, Motivational Speaker

- ♥ Finally, can you choose one item from the energizer list that you can make time for in the next week? Consider setting one short-term goal.

Self-Care

- ♥ Self-care is any activity that creates a sense of comfort and well-being, both in the short and long term, and can occur in various dimensions of health, such as emotional, social, or spiritual health.
- ♥ To truly care for yourself, it's important to acknowledge how you feel, to see and hear yourself in the situation, and to offer yourself comfort that will meet your need. Sometimes your need will be met by a long walk, and sometimes it's simply a rest. Self-care can be calling a friend, or saying no to a loud and busy social event. Only you know what activity will truly feel comforting for you.
- ♥ It's important to note that self-care is not necessarily self-improvement. Although the activities of self-care can be beneficial and have positive effects on your health or fitness, the goal of self-care is to meet your own needs and to feel better, cared for, and more grounded.

Action Planning

- ♥ According to self-management research³, one of the keys to goal-setting is to focus on one step at a time or a short-term action that can be accomplished in a week. This is called an action plan.
- ♥ Keeping it short-term and very easy to reach helps build confidence and success in reaching larger goals. When thinking about your action plan, consider:
 - What you are going to do?
 - How much will you do?
 - When you will do it?
 - How often will you do it?

For example, if your goal was to become fitter by swimming, then the action plan for your first week might be:



I'm going to swim twice a week for 20 minutes with my friend, on Mondays and Wednesdays, right after work.

If your goal was to improve your social dimension of health, then the action plan might be:

I'm going to have coffee with Mary on Tuesday for an hour, have Laura over for a visit on Friday morning, and call my sister on the phone on Sunday afternoon for a longer talk.

- ♥ The research on action planning suggests a key element of success is once you've written your action plan, ask yourself, “on a scale of 0 to 10, with 0 being totally unsure and 10 being totally certain, how sure am I that I can complete this entire plan?” If you answer 7 or more, then chances are very high that you've set a realistic goal. If you are less than 7, go back to your action plan and dig deeper and find out why you don't feel confident. This will help you change the action plan to one that you feel more likely to complete.
- ♥ Find the best way to check in with yourself on how the plan is going. It might be having a friend or co-worker check in or it could be checking off the items on your action plan.

3. “According to self-management research” Centre for Collaboration, Motivation and Innovation. 2014. Brief Action Planning: A White Paper



“Anytime I feel overwhelmed with the needs of my Mother (or her angry outbursts) I just think of the group and look forward to the warm support and caring kindness shown me. Thank you.”

—Support Group Participant

What You Can Do Right Now

For [emotional support or questions](#) related to caregiving, call our toll-free line (BC) at 1-877-520-3267. We’re available Mon-Fri, 8:30am to 4pm. When you call our Support Line, we will talk you through whatever is on your mind. If we feel you could benefit from more one to one support, we will refer you to our [1:1 Caregiver Coaching for more complex situations](#).

To receive news and information by email, [sign up](#) for your newsletter and e-news; and upcoming FCBC webinar.

Want to learn more about how to be a caregiver? Sign up for an upcoming [webinar](#). These free educational events cover your high-priority questions.

[Join a family caregiver support group](#). We’re also continually expanding our list of community caregiver support groups around BC. [Find one near you and get together with people who “get it”](#). Learn from other family caregivers and share your advice to help others.

Doing everything on your own can make you feel like you’re alone. It helps to have someone to talk to.

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