

Pathways

SERVING FAMILIES AND CAREGIVERS OF BRAIN
IMPAIRED ADULTS AND THE FRAIL ELDERLY

Seven Ways Family Caregivers Can Combat Compassion Fatigue

Guidelines from an expert who's also had personal experience



AS FAMILY CAREGIVERS, we strive each day to deliver compassionate care to our loved ones. But we're often at risk of burnout, especially during the pandemic.

In fact, a recent Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report found that the rates of symptoms of anxiety disorder and depression as well as serious consideration of suicide have been much higher for unpaid family caregivers than the public in general lately.

Physical, mental and emotional exhaustion can reduce our effectiveness in caring not only for our loved ones but also for ourselves. The result? "Compassion fatigue." I know this personally, having served as an at-home caregiver for my dad for many years.

Adapting to the new normal for caregivers is a lot like climbing Mount Everest. As we ascend the tall demands of caregiving, coupled with the stresses of day-to-day life and the uncertainties of a global pandemic, we are increasingly at risk of depletion. Often, we focus so intently on our goal—caring for the loved one who needs us—that we neglect caring for ourselves. Sleep suffers, worries compound and a range of health issues may eventually emerge.

If we fail to care for ourselves first, we will be ineffective in caring for others.

Yet, despite the difficulties, something within pushes us forward. That's because being a family caregiver requires a special heart.

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Seven Ways, continued from page 1

Like climbing a steep precipice, reaching our goal demands careful preparation, resilient stamina and essential skills for navigating difficult conditions. Here are seven guidelines to reach our destination without hurting ourselves and to combat compassion fatigue:

1. Take Care to Give Care

Many family caregivers have trouble asking for help. Their perspective is, "I will crash and burn before saying what I need for myself. My job is to *care for*, not to *be cared for*."

Yet if we fail to care for ourselves first, we will be ineffective in caring for others.

Remember these three principles: We must receive before we can give; we must learn not to put ourselves last and we must be kind to ourselves by taking time to rest, recharge and recover.

2. Plan Each Day

An essential component of being an effective caregiver aligns with the first step in being a successful mountain climber: planning the journey.

In caregiving, it's a four-step process:

1. Choose your planning medium, either a physical planner or a digital calendar, such as Google or Outlook.
2. Schedule a one-hour weekly planning session for yourself on a specific day and at a time most convenient for you.
3. Block off time for each daily activity beyond caregiving, such as maintaining your work schedule, shopping, exercising, sleeping, having quiet time, nurturing your spiritual practices, keeping doctors' appointments and spending time with family and friends.
4. Be flexible and realistic, leaving room in your life for unexpected events.

3. Cultivate Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence is a set of skills that influences how we perceive and express ourselves, nurture our social relationships, cope with stress and use emotional information to make better decisions.

When we're below threshold physically, emotionally and spiritu-

ally, day by day we shift into survival mode. It's impossible to cultivate emotional intelligence in this state of running on empty.

The Harvard Business Review article, "On Emotional Intelligence," offers an assessment tool, based on five domains and competencies: self-awareness, positive outlook, self-control, adaptability and empathy.

To cultivate these qualities, the article says:

- Practice active listening to determine the options and preferences of others
- Communicate effectively, understanding others' intents and motives to build trust and rapport over time
- Watch the tempo of your thoughts and words; slow down
- Continue to multitask while "holding space," meaning being present to others
- Be mindful of your tone and body language
- Stay motivated, driven by a sense of purpose to accomplish your daily tasks
- Be open to feedback and new ideas

What is the secret sauce for sustaining emotional intelligence? Empathy, the ability to understand and share the feelings of another.

Empathy is needed not only in caring for others, but in loving and forgiving ourselves.

4. Follow the Caregiver's Bill of Rights

To help family caregivers better care for themselves, the Family Caregiver Alliance has compiled what it calls A Caregiver's Bill of Rights.

Its preamble reminds caregivers to be honest about what you need, including the right to:

- Take time for yourself; it's not selfish, it's necessary
- Know your capacity; always strive to leave 10% "in the tank" and say no when you're running low
- Manage your time in a way that works best for you
- Receive compassion from others
- Ask for help
- Acknowledge which environments drain you and which ones restore you

- Recognize your "emotional load," weighing energy input against energy output

5. Build Your Support Network

It also helps to consult with your confidants.

Develop a trusted inner circle, including family members, close friends, co-workers, mentors, counselors, and faith and support groups, with whom you can openly share.

6. Seek Physical, Mental and Emotional Recovery

Restore your body; refresh your mind and spirit.

Physical recovery ranges from proper nutrition, adequate hydration and sufficient sleep to deep breathing, regular exercise and stretching and soothing therapeutic massage.

A recent University of Buffalo study found that sleep significantly influences the effectiveness of care that caregivers provide to dementia and Alzheimer's patients. According to the research, caregivers with poorer sleep quality experienced more fatigue and less energy. As care recipient functionality decreased, caregiver fatigue increased and energy decreased.

Mental and emotional recovery activities include quiet time; artistic pursuits such as drawing, painting and singing; walks in nature; spiritual nourishment and journaling.

Journaling simply means: Write down the things you are thankful for.

7. Celebrate and Have Fun

When we take time to care for ourselves, being a family caregiver can bring us great joy. So, celebrate your caring heart. Make room for laughter.

Focus on the five activities that bring body, mind and spirit into equilibrium: love, care, thanksgiving, compassion and forgiveness.

The most effective mantra to surmount compassion fatigue? *Don't be your own worst enemy.* Instead, be your own best friend. Speak kindly to yourself and give yourself grace.

When we befriend ourselves, we can love and serve others more abundantly.

By Stephen Chee, Next Avenue Contributor & Director of Employee Wellness at Lifetime Wellness, August 18, 2020. Reprinted with permission, Next Avenue, <https://www.nextavenue.org>



IN LETTERS FROM MADELYN,

Chronicles of a Caregiver, author and speaker Elaine K. Sanchez shares intimate and honest letters from her mother Madelyn Kubin, who cared for her husband for over six years after he suffered a debilitating stroke. Throughout this humorous and enlightening book, Elaine highlights her mother's attitude of "creative indifference," which Madelyn describes as "not allowing yourself to become emotionally ravaged by the disease or progression of events." Letters from Madelyn is available on Amazon, in bookstores, and on Elaine's website CaregiverHelp.com.

EXCERPT: I am very disturbed with the advice that is being given to people today about "doing your own thing and to hell with everyone else." I think that is responsible for a lot of the divorces and unhappiness in the world today...

As an old lady, I'm here to tell anyone who will listen that life is not made of up of doing what you want to do! When a person commits to marriage and parenthood, your time of living for yourself is gone—FOREVER!

When I look back over my life, it is hard to see what I have done just for myself. I have, of course, learned to find my own space and time in my mind. Finding Unity has been the greatest thing that ever happened to me. I have said for many years that living strictly on the physical plane has very little joy for me. I can't see why some people fight so hard to live.

I can't see anything so wonderfully exciting or invigorating about

getting up in the morning, fixing breakfast, doing the dishes, making the bed, picking up the papers, doing laundry, fixing lunch, doing the dishes, doing some more laundry, and more housework. An exciting day for me might consist of having a good telephone conversation or possibly meeting an interesting person in the grocery store or on the street. And for this I should spend money on vitamins, try to eat right, and exercise so I can prolong this wonderful life experience? HA!

The joy I have comes from sharing with Quentin (and that does not usually include doing just what I want to do). As a matter of fact, I have felt very restricted in doing what I want to do, and it is much more so now.

You are a big joy to me, and I cannot imagine my life without you. There are many things, but one of the big joys is being able to share thoughts with you. There is no one else I can be so free with. I do love the boys, but the relationship is so very different.

Getting along with daughters-in-law does not always come under the title of "doing just what I want to do." I love and enjoy the grandkids, too. There again, there is very little that qualifies as "doing what I want to do." There are none of these relationships, including the one with you, where I can say I am number one and I can and will only do what I want to do within that relationship.

My greatest joy in life comes from learning and growing mentally and spiritually. The great thing about having my own "space and happiness from within," is that I can stay more or less detached emotionally, and still do what has to be done to give other people a reasonable amount of happiness.

Well, I could probably write a book on this, but Quentin will be in for lunch before long, so I'd better get with it.

INVITATION TO CONTRIBUTE TO CAREGIVER'S COLUMN

We invite you to submit original work (poetry and prose) to be featured in upcoming newsletters. Send submissions directly to crc@deloro.org. If you reference or borrow from specific sources, please be sure to cite them properly.

Submit no later than March 5, 2021 to be considered for our spring issue.

GOODBYE, Anne!

OUR BELOVED DIRECTOR OF PROGRAMS AND CLINICAL SERVICES, Anne Spaller, retired from Del Oro at the end of September. Anne, who worked at Pacific Bell for many years, developed a passion for serving older adults after taking gerontology coursework at American River College. She "had the incredible luck" to begin a second career as one of Del Oro's Family Consultants in 2005, which she considers "one of the greatest honors of my life."

As a staff, we took some time to reminisce about meaningful moments with Anne over the years. Here are some highlights, in the words of her colleagues:

- Reviewing life as grandmothers, especially when her granddaughter fell down the slide at the park, and she filmed it!
- Anne and her ingenuity with respite service and also her usage of "robust" to describe respite and services.
- I love to remember how Anne shared many hugs and support when I was going through a difficult time. Her smile and laughter are my fondest memories. Being her birthday buddy for her 60th was a delight!
- Sitting with Anne at the lunch table always brought lively and engaging conversations that left us feeling more knowledgeable and connected. Sharing those laughs in the middle of the day always made it easier to get through the rest of the afternoon.

We decided to articulate our admiration for Anne in a revision of John Denver's "Annie's Song," even though some of us are not trained vocalists. [The recording is NOT available to the public.] Rochelle Van Driel rewrote the lyrics and the last verse captures our overall sentiment as we send Anne off:



Come, share to-ge-ther
All these mem-ries cre-a-ted.
For the good and the bad times,
For the friend-ships sublime!
For your ser-vice and shar-ing,
For the bles-sings you bring us.
You fill up our-sen-ses,
Anne- our friend for all time!

*Thank you for your years of service, Anne,
and we hope that you enjoy this new chapter
of your life!*

Staff Spotlight



**Stephani Gunther, BSW
Family Consultant**

Stephani Gunther, BSW, brings a bachelor's degree in Social Work from Fresno Pacific University and 17 years of experience in adult day programs to Del Oro Caregiver Resource Center. Stephani has served as a Program Manager for Valley Caregiver Resource Center in Fresno where she managed two adult day programs for people with

Alzheimer's and dementia. It is her passion to serve older adults and their families as they go through the caregiving journey. Drawing on her extensive background in adult day programming, she also enjoys educating caregivers about activities that they can implement in their homes. In addition to serving her clients, Stephani enjoys traveling and spending time with her family.

Welcome, Stephani!



**Megan Valsecchi, AMFT
Family Consultant**

Megan Valsecchi graduated from California State University, Fullerton with a degree in Human Services in 2015. She then earned a master's degree in Counseling from California State University, Sacramento in 2018. Megan holds the titles of Associate Marriage and Family Therapist as well as Associate Professional Clinical Counselor. During her time in

graduate school, Megan worked at an adult day program where she fell in love with working with seniors and became passionate about the caregiver community. When a position became available at Del Oro CRC, Megan was headstrong in her pursuit of working for such an amazing and impactful organization. Megan believes Del Oro serves an important role in the community and is a strong advocate for caregivers and their loved ones. When she is not working, she enjoys spending time with friends, going to the movies, sampling local craft beer, and spending time with her cat, Rue.

Welcome, Megan!

THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS



BENEFITTING FAMILY CAREGIVERS IN OUR COMMUNITY

On June 24th, Del Oro Caregiver Resource Center held our 15th Annual Cruise around the World Cook-off and Fundraiser; however, due to COVID-19, we had to take this event online! While we were uncertain of how a traditionally in-person and interactive event would translate virtually, the collective efforts of Del Oro's Fundraising Committee, Board, and Sponsors ensured the success of our new venture. We are proud to report we raised just over \$50,000, more than we ever have before! These precious funds will allow us to expand much needed services to family caregivers in our community.

At the heart of the event is a cook-off competition between local senior care providers, which can be a bit tricky to move to a virtual space! Nevertheless, we persisted, experimenting with new online platforms, such as live streaming. Each of our cook-off partners made a video of their chef preparing a dish, and our community voted to determine the winner. We were overwhelmed by enthusiastic engagement of our local supporters. Even when we attempted to announce the final results via Facebook Live, the votes continued to pour in!

After a thorough tabulation, we are happy to report this year's winners:

**FIRST PLACE— AlphaOne Ambulance Medical Services
with Chef Z's Grilled PB & J**

**SECOND PLACE— Almond Heights
with Chef Vo's Avocado Delight**

**THIRD PLACE— ACC Maple Tree Village
with Chef James' Black Pepper Corn Ribeye**

Thanks to the generous support of our sponsors, culinary partners, and attendees, Del Oro exceeded our fundraising goal, even during this difficult season. The pandemic has certainly made life more challenging for everyone, and we're so grateful to continue to be able to provide vital services to family caregivers in our community! We appreciate your support of our fundamental mission to improve the well-being of family caregivers throughout their journey.

A Heartfelt Thank You to Our Cruise around the World Sponsors

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House to Home Moving

Right At Home

Well Quest of Elk Grove

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of Northern California

Caregivers of Land Park

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LPL Financial

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Sunrise Senior Living

The Commons at Elk Grove,
MBK Senior Living

Thank You Sponsors!, continued from page 5

We honor and thank all of our cook-off partners for all of their hard work:

AlphaOne Ambulance Medical Services,
Chef Z, Grilled PB & J!
Almond Heights, Chef Vo,
Avocado Delight
ACC Maple Tree Village Senior Services,
Chef James, Black Pepper Corn Ribeye
Revere Court Memory Care,
Chef Thomas, Summer Time Favorite—Pasta Salad
Eskaton Senior Living,
*Chef Michelle, Plantain Boats with Pulled Pork
and Peach Barbecue Sauce*
The Commons at Elk Grove,
Chef Meghan, Blue Hawaiian Cake
The Oars Senior Living,
Chef Mikah, Pandemic Ramen
Carlton Senior Living,
Chef Roger, Summer Noodle Salad
Well Quest of Elk Grove,
Chef Michael, Jamaican Parrot Fish
Greenhaven Place,
Chef Maria, Vegetable Fried Lumpia

If you would like to check out all of our cook-off partners as each Chef prepares their recipe, please visit Del Oro's newly-launched YouTube Channel.

A HUGE Thank You to our Cruise around the World Fundraising Committee:

Cassie Bush, *The Vintage Farmhouse and EverNest*
Sondra Campbell, *The Oars Senior Living*
Jenny Caracciolo, *Sunrise Senior Living*
Oksana Chigirina, *Suncrest Hospice*
Wayne Davis, *Sunrise of Carmichael*
Cynthia Driver, *Eskaton Live Well at Home*
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Scott Okamoto, *ACC Maple Tree Village*
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Mike Ryder, *AlphaOne Ambulance Medical Services, INC.*
Casey Simon, *Revere Court Memory Care*
Tiffany Phillips, *Home Instead Senior Care*
Chris Ventura, *Eskaton Live Well at Home*
Michelle Nevins, *Del Oro Caregiver Resource Center*

ADVOCACY UPDATE: A HEARTFELT THANK YOU

In May 2020, Del Oro Caregiver Resource Center and our 10 sister CRCs across the state of California faced a huge crisis. With the spread of coronavirus and looming economic downturn, our political leaders had to make some difficult decisions about how to weather the impending storm. The Governor's May Budget Revise proposed to reverse the 2019 augmentation of the statewide CRC system, which would have resulted in a 65% cut to our budget and therefore a significant reduction of staff and services.

Nevertheless, we persisted. Del Oro and the other CRCs quickly mobilized a massive advocacy campaign to reject these proposed cuts. We were so blown away by the turnout of former, current, and prospective clients who rallied alongside CRC staff and leadership. After a concerted effort to overturn the proposed legislation, we prevailed in maintaining our current budget and therefore preserving the people and services who are so invaluable to our caregivers during this pandemic.

We know that this is a difficult time for everyone, but we are so grateful to our community for recognizing the important role we play in the lives of some of the most vulnerable members of our society. We want to thank you for devoting time and resources to helping us continue to carry out our mission to improve the well-being of caregivers during an unprecedented time in our nation's (and world's) history.



Friendly Volunteers NEEDED!

**Do you love people? Do you love
Del Oro Caregiver Resource Center?**

We are looking to fill several volunteer positions at Del Oro and we need YOU! Whether you can spare a few hours a week, or make a more significant time commitment, please consider becoming a Del Oro volunteer.

We can use your help in the following areas:

**Office Help
Fundraising
Speaking Engagements
Translation assistance
Advocacy**

If you are interested, please contact Amber Henning, Director of Finance and Administrative Services, at ahenning@deloro.org or (916) 728-9333.

Thank You

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My father in memory care and on hospice

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