How To Discuss

Caregiving is exhausting and burdensome work for which there is often no vacation. The burdens associated with caregiving are cumulative, can influence a person’s emotional well-being, and negatively affect relationships. Many people are hesitant to express their struggles with caregiving out of love and respect for their loved one. As such, you may need to reassure the caregiver and remove any guilt. It is important to foster an open discussion about the importance of self-care.

Practically, it is necessary to remember that many patients are caregivers for someone else. As such, it may be important to screen appropriate patients about their caregiving role in the context of their regular medical visits.

WHAT IS IT?

A group-based, highly-structured participatory workshop led by two trained peer leaders over 6 weekly 2.5 hour sessions. The program is based off the format of the Living Well with Chronic Conditions program, but the content is targeted to influence the behavior, affect, and cognitive skills of caregivers. The program emphasizes the importance of self-care for caregivers and the focus is strictly on enhancing caregivers’ well being and coping skills. Topics covered and tools provided address principles of self-care and responsibility, stress reduction, communication, learning from emotions, decision-making, and problem-solving. All participants receive a “Caregiver Helpbook” and are encouraged to implement personalized self-care “action plans” throughout the program.

WHO IS IT FOR?

Participants can be any family member or friend who provides any type of care for any person, although most participants are caregivers of older people with any chronic medical condition or dementia. There is no “threshold” of direct caregiving activity that would determine appropriateness for the program. Indeed, care recipients may live at home, in a care facility, or a long distance from the caregiver.

WHAT DOES IT DO?

The program was developed in Oregon in the 1990s as an adaptation of the Chronic Disease Self-management Program (Living Well with Chronic Conditions). A pre-post evaluation of the program showed the participants reported high usage of the tools taught and had improvements in self-efficacy, emotional well-being, and self-care behaviors. These findings have been confirmed in other, similar evaluations in diverse settings. A quasi-experimental study among 210 spouse caregivers of disabled partners showed the program was effective at reducing psychological stress and caregiver burden.