

Lesson 3 –Crisis Management

To understand the concept of caregiver crisis management, we first need to understand the concept of crisis management.

Crisis management is the application of practices and strategies designed to help deal with a significant negative event and minimize damage.

We tend to think of a crisis as an unpredictable event or unforeseeable sequence, or consequence, of one or more events that holds potential risk. In the case of caregivers, a crisis can often be predictable and foreseen.

Managing crises requires unique skills, behaviors, practices and strategies as well as the ability to make decisions quickly that will minimize as much as possible and, possibly, prevent damage.

The nature of caregiving addresses potential damage on many levels such as: health, safety, finance, and wellbeing. These potential damages can be crises.

A crisis is

- a time of intense difficulty, trouble, or danger

- a time when a difficult or important decision must be made.

- the turning point of a disease when an important change takes place, indicating either recovery or death.

Oxford Dictionary

There are three kinds of crises:

1. Creeping Crisis – foreshadowed by a series of events that decision makers do not view as part of a pattern.
2. Slow-Burn Crisis – some advance warning before the situation has caused any actual damage.
3. Sudden Crisis – damage has already occurred and will get worse the longer it takes to respond.

Caregivers are constantly dealing with crises.

Crisis management consists of four parts:

1. **Risk management** – looks for ways to minimize risks
2. **Pre-crisis** – set of practices and strategies put into practice in order to prevent and prepare.
3. **Crisis response** – the way one reacts and behaves to a crisis when it happens
4. **Post-crisis** – looks for ways to better prepare for the next crisis

Caregiving is Crisis Management at its finest.

Get comfortable feeling uncomfortable.



Caregivers often manage another person's physical, emotional, spiritual, and practical needs while managing their own lives, needs, family, and work.

In many ways, caregiving is like running a business. It needs to be managed. It has its ups and downs. There are times for investment and times to reap the fruits. There are times of certainty and clarity and there are times of crisis. It is always a challenge and as such, there is always a need to learn new things, process information and emotions, work within deadlines and relationships, collaborate, delegate, and communicate clearly.

Little by little, and sometimes all at once, caregivers need to take on new tasks – From being "housewife" to knowing all about the finances, the furnace, and even the funeral arrangements; From being son to changing a parent's diaper. And – the tasks that the caregiver chooses not to, or cannot, take on, need to be taken on by someone else. Skills might need to be sharpened in all of these areas – as in running a business, caregiving requires looking and taking care of the details as well as the whole picture.

Crisis management requires improving practical, functional skills. As Caregiver Coaches we often need to add "mentoring" to our toolbox and coach our clients, who are managing an "organization", on enhancing their **Executive Function** skills.



Executive Functions are the mental processes that enable us to make plans, focus our attention, remember instructions, and multitask successfully. They are often described as "the brain's management system" because they offer skills that help us assess the situation, create a plan of action, and get things done.

Executive Function skills are self-management skills that help individuals achieve goals. To be effective, caregivers must organize and plan their work and time, manage their emotions, focus attention, and reflect upon and revise their tactics as circumstances change. Therefore, well-developed Executive Function skills become critical to performing well.

Professional literature in child development recognizes 7 Executive Functions: adaptable thinking, planning, self-monitoring, self-control, working memory, time management, and organization.

There are 13 Caregiver Executive Function skills that we, as Caregiver Coaches, are required to assess and assist our clients master:

1. Self-management (aka self-control/self-regulation/self-restraint)
2. Working memory
3. Emotion agility
4. Task initiation
5. Planning and prioritization
6. Organization
7. Stress management
8. Time management
9. Flexibility and adaptable learning
10. Self-reflection / self-monitoring
11. Adaptable thinking
12. Multi-tasking
13. Self care (this will be reviewed in it's own session)

1. Self-management (aka self-regulation/self-control/self-restraint)

It is the pursuance of long-term goals despite the obstacles generated by desires, impulses, habits, emotions, and/or thoughts. It is also the ability to restrain from physical or emotional outbursts.

Strong self-control in the context of caregiving -

Among the caregivers' primary goals are the protection, safety, and wellbeing of the care recipient to the best of their ability. The caregiving role is like riding a rollercoaster – the ups and downs are often controlled by the care recipient's medical and emotional conditions, and the caregiver's reactions to them regulate the various speeds. Roller-coasting can be fun, but it is not something that can be done 24/7. Although the ability to completely lose control makes the rollercoaster ride attractive, this can only work when the person riding it is confident that it is safe and secure. In caregiving, the caregiver is the one who ensures that the ride is safe and secure.

Self-management strategies create a platform for the caregiver to manage the stress of these responsibilities that are experienced daily.

“The management of disturbing emotions and impulses, channeling them in useful ways. A leader with self-control will remain calm and clear-headed in crisis or under stress. Refraining from acting on impulses also helps others not to see a leader who falls prey to a trying situation, or who lashes out inappropriately.”

Danial Coleman

Jane's mother, Debbie, has dementia. Jane doesn't know how her mother will act or react in any situation. Sometimes she is calm, sometimes focused, sometimes happy, sometimes angry, sometimes very sad, and even violent at times. For Jane to continue taking care of her mother, she needs strong self-control.

2. Working Memory

The ability to retain and store learned information and put it to use later. This skill is responsible for short-term memory and execution. Working memory is like a mental post-it note.

Strong working memory in the context of caregiving -

In caregiving, working memory involves mentally filing the following information for easy access:

- Everything relating to the care recipient, including and not limited to the illness, medications, schedule, relationships, triggers, and reactions,
- Everything relating to the caregiver, including and not limited to commitments to other family members, work, home, and friends

“Working memory capacity is really the ability to hold and manipulate information while you’re actively trying to block out distraction.”

Amishi Jha

Larry's mother, Lydia, suffers from dementia, shingles, and a sprained ankle. Lydia lives in her own home and has a full-time paid caregiver. Larry has a very consuming job and a very demanding boss. It is Larry's responsibility to make sure that everything is in order and that he can answer any superficial question fast and to the point.

3. Emotional Agility

The ability to be aware of the emotions one is experiencing in the moment, process and understand them, balance their intensity and shift into another selected emotional state.

Emotional Agility in the context of caregiving –

The caregiving relationship does not begin the moment that the caregiving begins. There is always a history, and, for caregivers, that history often intertwines with the present. Emotional agility for caregivers is the capacity to be healthy with their thoughts, emotions, and narratives. This is gained by acquiring insights about situations and interactions for their feelings and then using this knowledge to adapt and change paradigms, realign values and beliefs, and make, or release, the emotional changes necessary for themselves, the care recipient, and the rest of their life circle.

“Feel the feeling but don’t become the emotion. Witness it. Allow it. Release it.”

Crystal Andrus

Ellen, Stella, and Faith are in their sixties. Their mother is independent and healthy. That being said, she needs help twice a week with shopping, cleaning, and accompaniment to various appointments. Ellen is always called upon to help. Stella and Faith are "too" busy. Ellen loves her mother and is glad to help, but would like her sisters to help as well. Every time she talks with one of her sisters, she feels that she is stressing out. This feeling stays with her for hours and influences her day. Ellen is now aware of her sisters' emotions, and as she understands them, she can balance their intensity and shift to an emotional state that services her.

4. Task initiation

The ability to start a task and avoid procrastination. The initiation can be difficult for many because of “perfectionism”. Anxiety caused by perfectionism will generally inhibit initiation. Hope of accomplishment will generally create movement and initialization.

Task initiation in the context of caregiving -

There are so many tasks to be performed by the caregiver – doctor's appointments, shopping, providing emotional and physical support, work, life. So many tasks that it is virtually impossible to do them all so, for many, the belief that some of the tasks will take care of themselves is predominant. In reality, things do not usually take care of themselves and caregivers must, in order to get things done, start the process. The caregiver can be motivated either from a place of anxiety or of hope.

“May your choices reflect your hopes and not your fears.”

Nelson Mandela

Reflecting upon the day, Amy looked at the list of things she had prepared in the morning. Most of it was not done. She had not made the doctor's appointment for her mother or that of the hair dresser. Her daughter's clothes were not clean for school. She hadn't even started the financial information she was supposed to give to the accountant by tomorrow. There was too much to do and as she looked back on the day, she realized that had she started anything, she would probably have moved forward on everything. It was time for her to investigate what was holding her back. Why was she procrastinating?

5. Planning and Prioritizing

The ability to think about the future, create a plan of action, and prioritize the different working parts. This involves using the imagination to see oneself carrying out tasks or seeing what will be needed during the process of carrying out tasks. Planning skills allow one to make a list of operations designed to accomplish a task effectively and determine the most important aspects.

A valuable prioritization and planning tool is the Urgent vs. Important Matrix.

Urgent / Important Do first (see multi-tasking)	Urgent / Not important Plan (schedule)
Important / Not urgent Delegate	Not important / Not urgent Eliminate

Planning in the context of caregiving -

In caregiving, planning provides a guide for action, improves the usage of resources, strengthens motivation and commitment, and allows flexibility within a structure. The structure and the planning provide the safe space and guidelines for the caregiver and the care recipient.

“The key is not to prioritize what’s on your schedule but to schedule your priorities.”

Stephen Covey

During the Corona period, Arnold was a front-line worker, so he worked out of the home. He is a widower with four sons, ages 6 – 16. The youngest is in a wheelchair as a result of the accident that killed his wife. The 10 year goes to school. The oldest 2 are at home, learning on-line. The family has a part-time housekeeper who helps out. Not only is it Arnold's job to make sure that every child does what he is supposed to do, but that they all believe in a future in which life is better. Arnold is constantly juggling his day and his priorities to ensure that his son gets the best medical help he can, that his other children flourish, and that he keeps his job.

6. Organization (Administrative and Logistics)

The ability to arrange tasks, resources, finance, and thoughts effectively. Organization also allows one to tell a concise story or keep track of possessions.

Organization thinking in the context of caregiving -

Recording information frees the psyche to work on other functions. Caregivers should record information that is constantly changing and needs to be updated regularly. Some examples:

- Keeping a record of the care recipient's health
- Creating and maintaining a Health Binder – allowing the caregiver, the care recipient, and other "team" members – both professional and familial- to track every aspect of health and share when necessary.

“Never memorize something that you can look up.”

Albert Einstein

Avi was diagnosed with prostate cancer several years ago. He was treated, and though the cancer was cured, many other symptoms and illnesses have arisen. He was calling his wife, Vered, regularly and letting her know. When they went to the doctor, they each shared information and supplemented each other. The doctor, to whom they had been waiting to see for three months, told them that he didn't have enough information, the information they shared was too vague. From that moment on, they kept records. These records provided the various doctors with an accurate glimpse into Avi's symptoms and gave the doctors the information that they needed to diagnose and provide a course of treatment.

Finances and legal

No one likes to discuss their finances. Traditionally husbands control the finances and the wife is vaguely aware of what's going on. Traditionally, parents don't share this information with their children. Caregiving crisis management means the caregiver must know how to organize the financial situation or at least have access to relevant financial information should the situation worsen.



Kathy and Joe were married for forty years. She was responsible for the home and he was responsible for making sure that there was "bread and butter" on the table. As Joe's dementia progressed, Kathy's children wanted to make sure that their mother knew what her financial situation was. Kathy did not want to know about it. Agreeing to learn about her and Joe's finances meant that she was accepting his continued decline. Joe did not want to share this information with Kathy as it meant that he could no longer take care of her. After much discussion (which they were fortunate to have been able to have), Joe shared the financial information with their eldest son.

7. Stress Management

The ability to manage stress and become resilient. This includes the ability to self-care and regenerate.

Stress management in the context of caregiving -

In caregiving, stress management allows for a "clear head and a steady hand". The caregiver needs to be in this state for both himself and the care recipient. When stress is managed, caregivers can provide better care, have fewer communication issues and less caregiving burden, be harmonized with other family members, make the right treatment decision, and have a better quality of life.

"It's not stress that kills us, it is our reaction to it."

Hans Selye

Tanya cares for her 12 year old daughter who suffers from an undiagnosed illness. The symptoms include acute pain in her abdomen, vomiting, and fainting spells. Tanya's daughter has missed many school days and activities and Tanya's job has greatly suffered. It is important for both of them to appear as though everything is normal so that they can each participate in social activities. This fear of missing out (FOMO) added to Tanya's stress levels which impaired her caregiving. When Tanya realized this, she and her daughter were able better communicate what was important and get the help they needed.

8. Time Management

The ability to schedule, complete tasks on time, and maintain patience throughout assignments. Time management is imperative for an array of scenarios as it facilitates the ability to jump from task to task and enhances productivity, punctuality, and goal-setting skills.

Time Management in the context of caregiving -

There are only 24 hours in a day, and during that time, there is a limit to the number of tasks we can complete. In other words, there is no way that everything that needs to be done can be done. For caregivers, time management is defined as the decision-making process that structures, protects, and adjusts a person's time to changing environmental conditions. Time management for caregivers involves the 3 A's:

- Awareness: thinking realistically about your time by understanding it is a limited resource.
- Arrangement: designing and organizing your goals, plans, schedules, and tasks to effectively use time.
- Adaptation: monitoring your use of time while performing activities, including adjusting to interruptions or changing priorities.

"Time management is a misnomer; the challenge is to manage ourselves."

Stephen Covey

May manages her schedule on her phone. She puts in all important appointments, including those of her grandmother who is living with her and her husband and three children. Her grandmother moved in with them two years ago and the first thing May realized was that she had too many priorities to do. She resigned from her job and dedicated herself to the nourishment and flourishing of her family and to the care of her grandmother. She now incorporates the 3 A's into her life and clearly and regularly updates her schedule. She puts her schedule and those of her family near the refrigerator on an erasable board so that they can learn and share.

9. Flexibility and Adaptable Learning

The ability to think, adjust and learn new skills as situations change.

Flexibility and adaptable learning in the context of caregiving -

The caregiver's role is constantly changing. Parenting is a perfect example of how a classic, healthy caregiving relationship changes – single person, pregnant, giving birth, feeding an infant, raising a child, learning from your teen, sharing with your young adult, becoming a grandparent. As the care recipient changes, as society changes (such as the COVID regulations), as other factors in the caregiver's life change (a promotion, divorce, medical challenge), the caregiver must be able to think, adjust, and learn new skills in order to remain balanced.

Each stage that the caregiver goes through, the caregiver is required to learn new skills, be flexible, and adapt.

“The mental flexibility of the wise man permits him to keep an open mind and enables him to readjust himself whenever it becomes necessary for a change.”

Malcom X

Sonya got 5 coaching sessions as part of her redundancy program. Her goal was to find a new job. As the coaching relationship developed it was clear that even though finding a new job was a priority and she seemed very committed to the process, she was stuck. When asked what going on at home, she said that her husband was very sick and that she was taking care of him. When asked to say a little more about that – she said that he had recently been diagnosed with cancer. As the discussion continued, it was apparent that he was at the beginning of a long journey. It became clear that she needed to make adjustments now and that a system needed to be put in place that would allow for adjustments to be made along the way.

10. Self-reflection (self-monitoring)

The ability to self-evaluate or comprehend how well one is performing a specific task. Self-reflection helps track and reflect on one's progress regarding a particular assignment and understand what adjustments may need to be made to accomplish the task at hand.

Self-reflection in the context of caregiving –

- Self-reflection provides the caregiver with another perspective, and the disassociation created invites learning.
- Self-reflection allows caregivers to put the focus on themselves. Self-reflection permits and encourages caregivers to think about how they handled themselves, how they felt, and what they thought.
- Self-reflection enables caregivers to become more empathic about their client's feelings and gain the emotional intelligence needed to provide adequate care.

“We do not learn from experience... we learn from reflecting on experience.”

John Dewey

At the end of every day, Jeremy writes in his journal. When the geriatrician first suggested that he keep a journal, Jeremy laughed and told her that reflective writing was "not his thing". The doctor recommended that he do this freely every day for 10 minutes. Jeremy has been doing this for the past year. The journal allows him to look back on the day with Linda. It is a place where he can freely share his feelings and thoughts without judgement and without anyone else's interference. In addition to this, he later created a "support group" to which he sends a weekly message with an assessment of Linda's moods, physical functions, their relationship, medical feedback and how he feels about it all. This allows him to be grounded and in a learning process.

11. Adaptable Thinking

The ability to solve problems, adjust to situations, and overcome instantaneous obstacles.

Adaptable thinking in the context of caregiving -

Adaptable thinking is fundamental to caregiving. It encompasses five major aspects:

- Seeing things from additional perspectives (2nd and 3rd position).
- Changing thought process
- Taking risks/seeing opportunities
- Encouraging others to be open-minded and view different perspectives
- Continual learning

When caregivers train themselves in adaptable thinking, they can more easily find mutually beneficial and "out of the box" solutions and can communicate with the care recipient and others better. As a result, caregivers with adaptable thinking can not only survive the caregiving period, but often they can flourish.

"It is not the strongest of the species that survives, not the most intelligent, it is the one that is most adaptable to change."

Charles Darwin

Sylvia's father fell from a ladder and cracked 5 ribs. Her parents lived in a two-story home and according to the medical team it was clear that he would not be able to go upstairs for a long period of time. Sylvia's mother wanted to do everything for him and take care of her loved one. He, on the other hand, needed some autonomy in order to feel anything like himself. This required Sylvia's mother to see things from his perspective. Sylvia was helpful in helping her mother accept things from a different perspective and change her thought process from one of "I am his wife and it is my duty to take care of him" to one of "he is an adult who can also take care of himself and the best way I can care for him is to become an ally".

12. Multi-tasking

Multitasking is the ability to do more than one thing at a time.

From a neurological perspective, our brain is wired to work linearly, meaning it is not wired to think about two things at once. We can perform two tasks at the same time providing that one of them has the nature of an automatic procedure and the other needs our attention. For example, stirring a pot while talking on the phone.

Multi-tasking in the context of caregiving –

In an acute situation, multi-tasking seems to be necessary as the feeling of overwhelm and the need to accomplish a lot is constant. The only time that there is a real need to multi-task is when there is a crisis, which means there is a real need to do more than one thing NOW. Here, multi-tasking is performing more than one assignment with the same level of urgency, specifically that we can't seem to prioritise them. When this happens we need to examine the paradigm that we have more than one task that is equally urgent by asking:

1. What's the most important thing that if it is not done right now, the care recipient will die?
2. What's the most important thing that if it is not done right now, the care recipient will suffer medical pain?
3. What's the most important thing that if it is not done right now, the care recipient will be in severe discomfort or suffer pain?
4. What can be delegated?
5. What is the real priority?

In a daily situation, multitasking is like juggling. Every juggler has a strategy: at every given moment, they are only dealing with one ball while the rest are in the air. The ball they are dealing with is the one that has landed in their hand – needs to get to the other hand – and needs to be thrown in the air. Basically, they are really dealing with one thing at a time, but they have a strategy for it.

We invite you to put your own example here.

The Guest House

*This being human is a guest house.
Every morning a new arrival.*

*A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
As an unexpected visitor.*

*Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture,
still treat each guest honorably.
He may be clearing you out
for some new delight.*

*The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
meet them at the door laughing and invite them in.*

*Be grateful for whoever comes,
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.*

Jalaluddin Rumi, translation by Coleman Barks ([The Essential Rumi](#))