

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 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 also be predictable and foreseen.

In either case, crises require 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 Crises – foreshadowed by a series of events that decision makers do not view as part of a pattern.
2. Slow-Burn Crises – some advance warning before the situation has caused any actual damage.
3. Sudden Crises – 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 the physical, emotional, spiritual, and practical needs of another person, 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 daughter 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 Functions** 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 management system of the brain” 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. In order to be effective, caregivers must be able to organize and plan their work and time, manage their emotions, focus attention, and reflect upon and revise their tactics as circumstances change. As the demands of caregiving increase and change, having well developed Executive Function skills becomes critical in order to perform well. Executive function, is often described as “the management system of the brain.” That’s because the skills involved let us set goals, plan, and get things done.

Executive functioning skills for the caregiver focus both on the caregiver and on the caregiver’s loved one. In order to make time for the caregiver and to move out of crisis mode, management, often without emotions, must be made on the loved one’s well-being. Caregivers start this by assessing (preferably before-hand) and keeping track of the loved-one’s situation.

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

As Caregiver Coaches we are required to make sure our clients are skillful in all 12 executive functions:

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

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

The ability to pursue long-distance goals despite obstacles generated by desires, impulses, habits, emotional and physiological. It is also the ability to restrain from physical or emotional outbursts.

Strong self-control in the context of caregiving -

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

“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 pray to a trying situation, or who lashes out inappropriately.”

Danial Coleman

Self-management strategies create a platform for the caregiver to manage the stress experienced daily.

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. In order 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 then later put it to use. 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 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 basically the capacity to be healthy with their thoughts, their emotions, and their narratives. This is gained by acquiring insights about situations and interactions for their feelings and then using this knowledge to adapt and change paradigms, to realign values and beliefs, and to 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 the emotions her sisters raise 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 avoid procrastination and start a task. 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 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 effectively accomplish a task and to adequately determine which aspects are the most important.

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

Arnold is a front-line worker, so he works 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.

"The key is not to prioritize what's on your schedule but to schedule your priorities."

Stephen Covey

6. Organization (Administrative and Logistics)

The ability to efficiently arrange tasks, resources, finance, materials, or thoughts in an orderly fashion. 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 of every aspect of health and share when necessary.

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.

“Never memorize something that you can look up.”

Albert Einstein

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 to know how to organize the financial situation, or at least have access to relevant financial information should the situation get worse.

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 the stress response to triggers and shift into a state of resilience. 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 a 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

8. Time management

The ability to properly organize a 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 there will always be more priority tasks than can be accomplish within that limit and some that won't. 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

- 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 managed 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 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 three 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, from that of the "Expectant Caregiver" through the "God Speed Caregiver", and each stage of the Caregiver Journey 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

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 specific 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 emphatic 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. He now looks back on what he writes and feels proud of himself and grateful for the day that she was able to share with Linda.

11. Adaptable Thinking

The ability to solve problems or adjust to situations when necessary 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. 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

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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](#))