

Lesson 5 – Coping with Challenges & Connecting to Resources

Caregivers have many roles. They have paid jobs, responsibilities, loves, hobbies, and sometimes even a “full” life beyond that of caregiving. For some, caregiving is in addition to what they do. For others, it is everything they do. For some it is new, for others it is something they have been doing for decades. For some it is a “calling”, for others it is a “burden”. For some, it is “just something we do”.

Through skills and awareness, caregivers can be prepared to cope with the challenges they face.



There are different ways to look at the challenges caregivers cope with, and since we have been looking at the similarities between “managing” caregiving and managing a business we want to offer the concept of VUCA as a main framework.

VUCA

Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous

VUCA is a term that originated from the US military and today is used in the context of management and leadership. It has become a principle, a learning model, and an operation mode to assess and enhance performance.

Looking at the nature and definitions of VUCA situations, the crises the caregivers need to manage, answer the same parameters:

- **Volatility**: the nature, dynamics, and speed of change.
- **Uncertainty**: the lack of predictability and information.
- **Complexity**: the multiplex of forces, parts and variables.
- **Ambiguity**: uncertainty of meaning, intention and cause-and-effect.

Looking at caregiver challenges through the VUCA lens provides a context in which caregivers can view their current and future states. When understood VUCA can set the stage for caregiving.

For many contemporary organizations – such as business, military, education, government – VUCA is a practical code for awareness and readiness. The manager, principal, director is responsible for most of the decisions regarding the parameters in which their organization operates. In the “care recipient’s organization”, the care recipient is the chairman of the board. The caregiver is the CEO, CFO, and COO. Incorporating VUCA into the caregiving field is powerful from two aspects, on the one hand, understanding of the principles of VUCA can empower the caregiver with tools from the business world and on the other hand, being aware of the dark side of VUCA can protect the caregiver from total depletion and burnout.

Stress is a physical and physiological response to a stressor that changes the way we normally react and think.

Stressors can be positive, negative, internal, external, short lived or long-lasting.

To fully understand how VUCA can hold both the power to empower and the power to destroy, we need to understand there is a difference between **Visiting a State of VUCA** and **Living in a State of VUCA** and that both have a direct connection to stress.

<u>Visiting a State of VUCA</u>	<u>Living in a State of VUCA</u>
Acute Stress	Chronic Stress
<p>Short term exposure to a specific stressor such as financial issues, doctor’s appointment, discussion with siblings regarding parental care.</p> <p>While acute stress can create peak performance and motivation it can also cause physical symptoms such as headaches, stomach aches or indigestion, sweating, heart palpitations, dizziness, shortness of breath.</p> <p>During an acute stress event, the body releases hormones like adrenaline and cortisol that flood the body to get the heart going and boost energy levels.</p> <p>Once the event/situation has ended, the body balances the levels of adrenaline and cortisol, the stress diminishes, and system recovers and returns to homeostasis.</p>	<p>Ongoing exposure to one or more unresolved stressors.</p> <p>The long-term high levels of cortisol in the body cause various health problems:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High blood pressure • A weakened immune system • Excessive hair loss • Muscular pain • High risk for cardiovascular disease and hypertension • Aggravation of existing medical and health conditions • Irritable bowel, nausea, or diarrhea • Weight gain • Impact on sexual function and fertility • Impact on mental state (confusion, memory loss, distortions in perception, difficulty in judgement,...) • Impact on emotional state (anxiety, anger, shame, guilt, sadness, depression, irritability, etc.)



*For caregivers, the stress can be either acute or chronic.
Many times, it is both.*

Acute stress can become chronic stress.
When chronic stress is not balanced it turns into **burnout**.

Burnout is a state of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged stress. It occurs when you feel overwhelmed, emotionally drained, and unable to meet constant demands.

In addition to the physical symptoms of stress, burnout includes emotional symptoms such as: mood swings, restlessness, irritability, oversensitivity, loss of objectivity, anger & resentment, poor concentration-focus-judgement, less enjoyment, decreased sense of purpose and meaning in life, and feeling ineffective/cynical/negative about life in general.

The Behavioral symptoms of burnout are most easily observed by others and can include:

- Increased drinking or smoking marijuana
- Anger outbursts and impatience with others
- Changes in eating or shopping habits (including on-line shopping)
- Less desire to be with others
- Reduced ability to feel empathy
- Frequent use of sick days and cancellation of sessions
- Lack of joyfulness
- Increased anxiety in public places
- Greater need to be in control in order to feel safe

Compassion Fatigue is defined as a combination of physical, emotional, and spiritual depletion associated with caring for someone in significant emotional pain and physical distress (Anewalt, 2009; Figley, 1995)

Compassion fatigue and burnout can be indicated by any of the above symptoms. It is, however, important to note that generally several of the symptoms need to be present before someone is identified with having compassion fatigue or being burnt out.

Additional resources on Caregiver Compassion Fatigue:

- How to manage compassion fatigue in caregiving - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7keppA8XRas>
- Compassion Fatigue: What is it and do you have it? | Juliette Watt | TEDxFargo - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v-4m35Gixno>

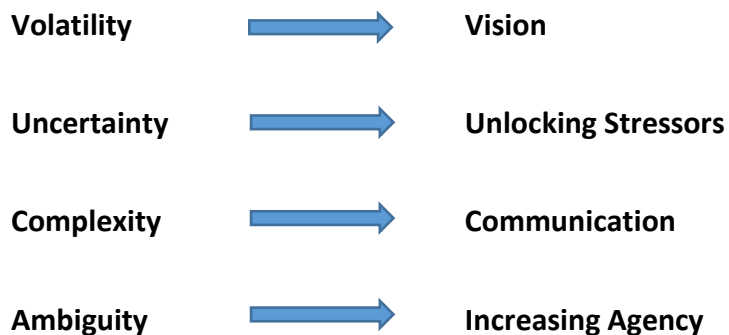
Secondary Traumatization is a term used to describe the effect of witnessing/ living with/ caring for someone coping with the effects of trauma and PTSD.

Secondary Traumatization can increase chronic stress and lead to depression, anxiety, and burnout.

You need to be able to be aware of this and if you do not have the training to coach your client through this, you need to be able to refer the client to someone who can.

Fear of recurrence or reoccurrence is the experience of worry and concern that the care recipient's symptoms or even illness might come back or happen again and that the caregiver will once again be in the situation that s/he was in before: uncertainty, lack of control, stress, etc. More often than not, it creates for the caregiver a state of anxiety and over-protection of the care recipient.

Flipping VUCA to create Radical Resilience



* Agency - capacity, condition, or state of acting or of exerting power (Webster's Dictionary)

Building Resilience

Like a rubber band, resilience is the ability to withstand, recover, and sometimes grow when faced with challenges. Resilience is bouncing back after a crisis. It's also bouncing forward to adjust to a "new normal."

This capacity to adapt and cope is present to varying degrees in every person, no matter how tumultuous external events or inner feelings may be. Resilience helps transform the overwhelming into do-able. It creates endurance, energy and strength. Building resilience helps sustain caregiver health & well-being; it expands capacity and reduces vulnerability to stress.

The 7C's of Resilience (based on Dr. Kenneth Ginsburg's work with youth and teens):
Competence, Confidence, Connection, Character, Contribution, Coping, Control

- **Competence:** the ability to do something successfully or efficiently. *For caregivers this might mean learning and/or relearning new skills & terminology.*
- **Confidence:** the feeling or belief that one can rely on someone or something. *For caregivers this means relaying the belief that the caregiver can be relied upon and the caregiver himself believing that he is reliable.*
- **Connection:** A relationship in which a person, thing, or idea is linked or associated with something else. *For caregivers this provides a security that allows them to be a leading part of the care recipient's team and to develop creative solutions.*
- **Character:** The mental qualities and values distinctive to an individual. *For caregivers this means identifying and being in conjunction with one's values.*
- **Contribution:** The act of helping or bringing to cause. *For caregivers it means giving and doing the best one can at any given moment.*
- **Coping:** to deal successfully with a difficult situation. *For caregivers, possessing a variety of healthy coping strategies will be less likely to turn to dangerous quick fixes when stressed.*
- **Control:** The power to influence or direct behavior or the course of events. *For caregivers, self-control affords the opportunity to look from different perspectives.*

Balancing life- caregiving – career

Sandwich Generation is a term currently used to describe individuals who care for the children while caring for one or both of their aging parents. They fall in the 40-65 age range. These caregivers are “over-functioning” and multi-tasking and “need” to do everything. Challenges facing the Sandwich Generation include:

- How does this family's situation influence each family member?
 - Work
 - Career
 - Living arrangements
 - Studies
- What are some of the challenges this family faces as a family?
- What are some of the strengths or resources needed?
- What discussions need to be held?
- What are the benefits (both obvious and hidden)?

Caregivers, like everyone else, often need to take a moment to balance and to readjust themselves. When facing challenges, balancing is basic.

Some simple ways of immediate balancing:

1. Grounding in the present moment. This creates an emotional balance and regains connection with present internal and/or external resources, examples are EFT, “controlled” breathing, & visualization.
2. Remind the client that s/he is more than the caregiving. Caregiving is something the client does. There is more to the client than his/her actions. There are internal resources.
3. There is more to the care recipient than the care recipient’s illness. The illness is one more thing in the client’s life, it’s not the only thing and it is not who he/she is. There is a soul, a person, a relationship. There are positive, warm memories.
4. Remind the client where the true control is. Here is a fact of life: we have no control of things that happen to us. We have no control over the world, other people and our bodies. The most fundamental human choice we have is the meaning we choose to give to things that happen to us. Where there is a choice – there is control. Since we see the world through the meaning we give it (our perception), when we choose the meaning – we control our subjective experience.
5. Name the real fear. Often fear of recurrence is not really about the recurrence of the illness. Sometimes it’s something else. It can be that the client is afraid of pain, of



needing to be helped, of feeling helpless, of dying, of losing something ... it can be many things. This doesn't necessarily make it easier but it does create clarity and clarity provides a sense of balance.

6. Speak the faith. Whether its religious, spiritual or anything else, invite the client to say out loud what he/she believes in. Ask the client to repeat it 5 times, loud enough for him/her to hear their own voice.

Additional Resources in the Sandwich Generation:

- Sandwich Generation <https://vimeo.com/383164062>

Hurdles

by Ogaga Erutaya

*Every day we face hurdles
Some small; some very small.*

*Every day we face hurdles
Some big; some very big.*

*Every day we face hurdles
Some few; some many*

*Yet they, we must,
Every day conquer*

*Or every day be found,
Seeking them to master.*

*For, overcoming hurdles,
Is what life is really about.*