

SURVIVAL STRATEGIES FOR CAREGIVERS

Caregivers can become emotionally drained from hearing about and being exposed to the pain and trauma of the people they are helping. These are a few tips to keep in mind before, during and after your exposure to traumatic events.

1. Know your own “triggers” and learn to defuse them or avoid them. Resolve your own personal issues and continue to monitor your own reactions.
2. Avoid “pathologizing” your vicarious stress responses. Remember that “normal responses to abnormal situations” is true for helpers and caregivers.
3. Find opportunities to acknowledge, express, and work through your experiences in a supportive environment. Debrief yourself regularly and build healthy support groups.
4. Balance your work with other healthy activities that provide opportunities for growth and renewal.
5. Set appropriate limits and boundaries for yourself. If you never say “No”, then what is your “Yes” worth??
6. Become aware of and alter any irrational beliefs about the helping process. Develop realistic expectations about the rewards as well as the limitations of helping.
7. Set and keep healthy boundaries. Ask yourself, *“Is the world such an awful place and have I so much power and responsibility that I cannot step away from my activities for an hour?” (Or whatever time is needed for yourself?)* Allow yourself to grieve when bad things happen to others. Remember to laugh, enjoy life and breathe deeply!
8. Seek assistance from other caregivers who have had experience with challenging situations and have remained healthy and hopeful. Take their advice.
9. Delegate responsibilities and develop a support system to protect yourself from compassion fatigue and emotional exhaustion. Use a support TEAM of other trained individuals. Don’t work alone.
10. If and when appropriate, try to get help from volunteers, family members or other supportive individuals to do routine duties.
11. Encourage other parents engaged in the same kind of work to exercise regularly and maintain good nutritional habits *especially when engaged in crisis response* by:
 - a. Eating nutritious foods
 - b. Taking calcium supplements to counteract high level of lactic acid produced by tension
 - c. Taking Vitamin C to maintain alertness
 - d. Eating regularly 4 to 5 times in small amounts
 - e. Eating high-energy non-perishable foods: dried fruit; granola bars; nuts; trail mix; fruit; water; mineral water; milk; decaffeinated coffee/tea; juice; electrolyte supplements.
 - f. Eating good balanced meals. Avoid caffeine, sugar, pastries, fast foods high in salt and fat.
 - g. Eating with a friend.
12. Avoid additional stressful situations and nourish spiritually enriching resources and activities.
13. Remember that some questions about what happens in life simply do not have answers.