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CAREGIVING WITH CONFIDENCE

A NEWSLETTER FROM EASA'S FAMILY AND FRIENDS LEADERSHIP COUNCIL



Care for You, Too

Caring for a loved one experiencing psychosis can demand everything you have.

That's why self-care isn't optional — it's essential.

Taking intentional actions to support your physical, emotional, and mental well-being allows you to continue showing up for the person you love without burning out.

In this issue, we share **our top three self-care tips and a caregiver's reflection** on a difficult period early in her daughter's illness; her story illustrates how recognizing your own needs can be the first step to meaningful self-care.

When you're feeling stuck, this downloadable toolkit of **101 Coping Strategies** offers quick ideas to reset, recharge, and reconnect:

www.sacredheart.edu/media/shu-media/counseling-center/101_Coping_Skills_ADA.pdf

Melinda's Story

Content Warning: Mentions of suicidal and homicidal thoughts.

"As we enter my best friend's yard, she asks me how I am and how my daughter is.

I flash back to a moment several hours ago when I sat on my daughter's bed and picked out her clothes as I had when she was tiny. She said she didn't want to commit suicide; instead, she was beseeching me to do it for her. My own daughter pleading with me, begging me to take her life. Mercy, she called it.

I picked out a dress, and settled on a scenario where neither of us was alive, maybe never born. I knew it was bad, but it was a kind of mental compromise that spared us death and murder.

And I tell my best friend, 'Fine', by which I mean that I feel as if a metal jaw has clenched onto my forearm and wrenched it free taking my upper arm, collarbone and a sizeable portion of my chest with it, but I don't bleed out. I don't seem to knit a scab.

In this context, 'fine' is a kind of white lie that is true for me. Fine is better than I have been for months. My daughter and I have both left the house and a glance across the yard sees that she is currently approaching something not unlike a smile. 'Fine' allows me to turn my bad arm away from the conversation and show my closest friend, the mother of the bar mitzvah boy, that I love her and that I intend to fully celebrate this day."

Self-Care Tip #1: Talk with people who understand

It's easy to feel alone when someone you love is living with mental illness. Reaching out to others can make that load feel lighter. These programs offer support, guidance, and reassurance, important tools for caregivers navigating this journey.

Multi-Family Group (MFG): Offered every other week at most EASA programs, MFG brings participants and family members together to socialize and problem-solve. Terrie says she wasn't ready to talk at first but found the group "ended up being a lifeline" and remains connected with people from her first session.

Local NAMI Meetings: NAMI hosts monthly support groups for families. Karma says she was hesitant to attend at first, yet found the group full of practical resources and relatable stories, saying the members "really got what our family was going through." Find your local NAMI group at nami.org/affiliate/oregon.

FriendSZ Mentoring: The CureSZ Foundation's FriendSZ program matches families with mentors who have lived through a loved one's psychosis. Learn more at curesz.org/friendsz.

Self-Care Tip #3: Calm conflict with better communication

Karma struggled for months trying to convince her son to take his medication. "I was banging my head against the wall," she recalls.

It wasn't until she realized his reality was different from hers that progress became possible. Resources like the book *I'm Not Sick, I Don't Need Help!* and the free online course for caregivers, **Psychosis REACH** (www.psychosisreach.org), taught her to listen rather than argue.

"It really calmed things down in our home," she says. Learning strategies for conflict reduction not only improved communication but also allowed Karma to care for her own well-being, showing how resolving tension can be a form of self-care.

Self-Care Tip #2: Practice mindfulness.

The daily stress of a loved one's mental illness can weigh heavily. Mindfulness has helped caregivers like Sue and Terrie find relief.

"One of the best things I did for myself was take a class on mindfulness and meditation," says Sue. "It helped me rein in my thoughts and just breathe. A few minutes a day really recharged my batteries."

Mindfulness — staying present and accepting each moment as it is — is a simple but powerful self-care practice. It helps caregivers reduce stress, stay grounded, and create moments of calm amid daily demands.

Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) classes are often offered at community colleges and wellness centers, and a free, self-paced course is available at PalouseMindfulness.com.

Terrie uses the free app **Insight Timer** to guide her through short exercises anytime she needs to let go of stress. Even a few minutes a day can help caregivers stay centered while supporting the people they love.

OPEN PHONE LINE

Want to talk to another caregiver who understands what you're going through?

Call EASA's Open Phone Line:
971-610-1529

Tuesdays, 5 - 6 PM
Fridays, 9 - 10 AM

Or, email Karma at clarkejung@ohsu.edu to schedule a time that works for you.



FFLC Needs YOU! Family & Friends Leadership Council is a group of adults caring for youth currently or formerly participating in EASA. We gather to support each other and work on projects (like this newsletter!) to improve EASA. Most months we meet online on the 4th Thursday from 6:30 - 8:00 PM. For details, contact Karma at clarkejung@ohsu.edu.