

COVID and Caregivers

**A presentation for New Mexico
Aging & Long Term Services Department**

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Care Giver Unique Challenge

- Caregivers will face a special challenge during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is important to acknowledge that there are two major types of challenges you will likely face:
 - Addressing the crisis with those you care for (elderly, child, mentally disabled).
 - Addressing your own feelings.

As a Caregiver

“The closest thing to being cared for is to care for someone else.”

Carson McCullers, *The Square Root of Wonderful*

As a Caregiver

- What populations are we considering?
 - Children
 - Elderly
 - Mentally Disabled
- How we interact with each population may be similar, but each also has its own challenges.

As a Caregiver

- Gauge the need and level of information to share and how to best discuss the changes and events that are occurring.
 - Use terms that are appropriate to their age and cognition.
 - Share at the correct level of information.
 - Assess what level of understanding the individual has.
 - Young children, elderly, mentally disabled may be limited in their understanding and acceptance.
 - More fear may be created by under sharing older children and those with higher cognition levels.

As a Caregiver

- Focus on the changes not the causes.
 - Elderly or mentally handicapped may find it difficult to understand what the causes are, but they are aware of the changes.
 - Discuss what they express as the hardship of the restrictions and their feelings.
 - Avoid information overload related to restrictions and let them lead.

As a Caregiver

- Long-term care residents will be impacted in many ways.
 - Isolated due to restrictions or lack of visits.
 - Failure to understand the “new way”.
 - Marked increase for some in areas of loneliness, anxiety, depression.
 - Worsening dementia and symptoms.

As a Caregiver

- Impact of children will vary and may be longer lasting.
 - Young children
 - Lack of socialization will have an impact of young children related to development and attachment.
 - Learning may be impacted and loss of skills previously learned.
 - Acting in an age-inappropriate manner may occur, regression.
 - Older children and teens.
 - Lack of socialization different than younger children due to their, sometimes, lack of socialization in non-COVID times.
 - Depression, anxiety, school failure, isolation.

As a Caregiver

- Overall Impact on Individuals
 - Increase in mental health concerns.
 - Oxford study shows individuals diagnosed with COVID are twice as likely (1:5 v. 1:10) to receive a first time psychiatric diagnosis within 90 days. (anxiety or depression, chronic fatigue syndrome, and post-traumatic stress)
 - Increase in substance abuse.
 - Increase in abuse and reduction in identified abuse.
- Need to be more aware than normal.

As a Person

“If you can’t change your fate, change your attitude.”

Amy Tan

As a Person

- We all have experienced normal stress reactions
- Change in activity levels
- Decreased efficiency and effectiveness
- Difficulty communicating
- Increased sense of humor/gallows humor
- Irritability, outbursts of anger, frequent arguments
- Inability to rest, relax, or let down
- Change in eating habits
- Change in sleep patterns
- Increased focus on cleanliness or infection

As a Person

- What we are experiencing is grief.
 - Be aware of those feelings and know it is normal and okay.
 - Every person is feeling this and has been feeling this for months.
- We are also feeling a large amount of anger and loss of control of our lives.

As a Person

- How to combat this?
 - Acknowledge it and accept you have a right to whatever you are feeling.
 - Avoid increased alcohol or substance abuse.
 - Practicing grounding, mindfulness exercises, meditation, and relaxation techniques can be helpful.
 - Stay connected without being over connected.
 - When you need help, professional or personal, seek it out.
 - A cup can't be filled from an empty pitcher.

References

- Nurstead Consulting Services “COVID-19 Stress and the Pandemic”
- Nurstead Consulting Psychology of the Pandemic
- Rogers, J. P., Chesney, E., Oliver, D., Pollak, T. A., Mcguire, P., Fusar-Poli, P., David, A. S. (2020). Psychiatric and neuropsychiatric presentations associated with severe coronavirus infections: A systematic review and meta-analysis with comparison to the COVID-19 pandemic. *The Lancet Psychiatry*, 7(7), 611-627. doi:10.1016/s2215-0366(20)30203-0

Questions?

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