



Managing the challenges of caregiving



Picture this: your kids are yelling asking for more of your time, you have five pressing deadlines to meet at work, there is a new frightening crisis presented in the news every day, you have 75 unread messages on your phone, your elderly parents are needing your attention and your partner is asking for date night tonight. Sound familiar?

This is the life of a regular caregiver in today's modern world. When more time isn't available to help reduce stress levels, what is? For this edition of our newsletter, our experts provide some guidance and a practical psychology toolkit to support you. Let's start with recognizing signs of burnout.

Burnout recognition

As caregivers, you may find yourself stretching your boundaries and looking to do more and be more. We strive to be perfect, worrying that we aren't meeting our own standards, and in the process, we become forgetful of what both they (our children and elderly parents) and you need – empathy for ourselves and time for self-care.

When we don't have empathy for ourselves or take the time to recharge and take care of our needs, we experience emotional burnout (also known as caregiver burnout). Burnout is a term we've often heard in the workplace, but it can occur anytime we are overextended and experience chronic stress.

There are some common warning signs to watch out for when it comes to feeling burnout – however, the symptoms can vary across individuals. Symptoms of caregiver burnout can include the following:

- Consistently feeling tired
- Irritability
- Feeling anger or frustration
- Crying often
- Feeling overwhelmed or worries constantly
- Ongoing feelings of helplessness
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Appetite and weight changes

Developing stress management skills

Our counsellors like to use the 3 Rs of stress management - **Recognize, Respond and Resilience**. We've covered the first R (To Recognize) above, now let's move on to Respond. Once you identify the signs and symptoms of burnout, you can start to prioritize self-care to start managing the impact. Take advantage of these tips below to prevent burnout altogether:

Focus on self-care

- Build a relaxation practice
 - Ex. Schedule time around work / family hours to do some yoga, meditation, deep breathing
- Connect with others
 - Ex. Call your friend or family member and go for a walk
- Control what you can
 - Ex. Take action and make decisions in the areas of life you have control over instead of dwelling on the areas you can't control

- Set boundaries and limits
 - Ex. Learn to say no and know when you've taken on too much
- Know and live your values
 - Ex. Understand what's important to you and live accordingly
- Reframe your thoughts/perspectives
 - Ex. When you experience a challenge, choose to see it as an opportunity to grow
- Take care of personal & health needs
 - Ex. Meal prep, exercise, drink enough water, schedule social activities and consider tracking finances
- Find what makes you happy
 - Ex. Explore new hobbies and make time for everything that fills you with joy
- Make an active choice around what you do and don't pay attention to
 - Ex. Take a look at both external factors (technology use and environment) and internal factors (behaviours and thoughts) that are within your control and decide what you'll give your time and energy to

The tips you choose to help manage the stresses in your life might vary by stressor or over time, but the key is to build and practice using your various tools to prevent yourself from feeling burnout.

Build resiliency

Building resiliency is also key to preventing future burnout from happening or recovering from a period of burnout.

Resilient people will display certain characteristics, such as:

- Perceiving self and abilities in a positive light
- Making realistic plans and sticking to those plans
- Having an internal locus of control (vs. external locus of control)
- Good communication skills
- Viewing self as fighters (rather than as victims)
- Possessing high emotional intelligence and healthy emotional regulation

You might be wondering how exactly can we build resilience? It can start with maintaining healthy relationships with family, friends and within your community; trying to see crises as surmountable (instead of unbearable); controlling only what you can; developing realistic goals, making decisions and taking action; using opportunities for self-discovery; developing confidence in yourself and others; keeping a long-term perspective and maintaining a hopeful outlook.

Caring for children vs aging parents

You may notice some similarities and differences when caring for your children vs caring for your aging parents.

If you're caring for your parents, expect new emotions to arise that you may not have anticipated. The role reversal of caring for your parents now - like they once did for you - may involve feelings of sadness, maybe some denial or even grief. Be honest with your counsellor if you're reaching out for support and let them know what you're going through mentally and emotionally.

You may also experience new financial strain as caring for your parents could involve caring for them over a longer period of time and there's no way to know just how long your support will be needed. With children, you understand that after a certain age, you release the training wheels - a concept that doesn't apply when caring for elder parents.

Another challenge you may encounter is around relationship dynamics. As a parent, children likely see you as an authority figure and chances are, they will respect you as this figure. When caring for parents, this perspective varies, and the role reversal once again may cause tension and unease. Consider obtaining a power of attorney early in your caregiving journey to avoid any challenges around legal and financial matters.

UPCOMING WEBINAR: September 14, 1:30–2:30 PM EST. [Establishing a great relationship with your child's teacher and school.](#) [CLICK HERE](#) to register.

Our counsellors are equipped to support you manage any caregiving difficulties and life challenges. If you're ready for counselling reach out to HumanaCare.

