

## Find Support in your Caregiving Role



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Talk to someone who provides care for their aging loved one and they will tell you what a stressful job caregiving can be. The American Medical Association states that the role of caregiving places demands on the caregiver which leaves them at risk for health problems, including serious illness and depression. And according to the American Journal of Public Health, middle-aged and older women caring for their spouses are 6 times more likely to suffer from depression or anxiety disorders than their non-caregiving counterparts. The result of this decline in health by the caregiver not only affects the person giving the care, but it may also compromise the care they are providing their loved one.

Reading information like this can make caregiving sound very bleak and discouraging. But we also know caregiving can be a very rewarding job. The key difference between a caregiver who is barely hanging on and one who is managing successfully is having proper support in their role as a caregiver. Healthy and content caregivers not only receive help with the ongoing responsibilities of providing care, but they also have found an emotional support network.

The American Medical Association suggests to physicians that "a referral to a support group should be recommended for all caregivers." Oftentimes, people hear the words "support group" and immediately tune out. They are uncomfortable with the idea of sharing their feelings. Or they think of a support group is a pity party or place to complain about their lives.

Support groups are much more than that, and the benefits they offer are valuable. Even amidst the pandemic, these groups continue to meet by phone or online.

The definition of a support group is a gathering (in person, by phone or video-conference) of people in similar situations, who provide each other moral support, practical information, and coping tips. Here are some of the benefits of attending support group meetings.

- They provide valuable information that will increase your knowledge of caregiving. One of the best resources for caregivers is other caregivers!
- They teach coping skills. The information and advice that the group provides can assist in problem solving the many different challenging situations you may be experiencing.
- They are a place to share common concerns and joys. Others in similar situations can then offer encouragement and support.
- They are a safe place to identify and express stressful feelings with people who will understand and offer emotional support. Having this support can improve your mood and decrease feelings of distress.
- They provide affirmation and advocacy. The group serves as a source of validation and can offer avenues to local resources.

The benefits of attending support group meetings can help you feel less alone, give you new strategies to cope with day-to-day stressors, and help you feel affirmed in your work as a caregiver. The result will be a healthier, happier you which in turn means better care for your loved one. By taking time to care for your physical and emotional needs, you will discover you can feel more joy and contentment in your caregiving role.

Currently there are dozens of support groups meeting virtually - by phone or video conference. You can find a list of them by visiting <http://wisconsin caregiver.org/virtual-events-for-caregivers> or contact your Aging and Disability Resource Center.

If you have never attended a support group, give it a try. You might find it to be just the thing you needed to help you through another day or week of caregiving. If you are in need of other caregiver support or resources, please contact your Aging and Disability Resource Center.

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