Spina Bifida and COVID-19

Self-Care for Caregivers
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Our Presenter

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Today’s Session

- What is self-care?
- Why is self-care important for caregivers, especially during COVID-19?
- How self-care needs for caregivers may change over time?
- How can caregivers practice self-care?
- Tools and resources for self-care
To Ask a Question

- Using the Zoom platform:
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What is self-care?

• **Self-care** = *any activity that we do deliberately and on a regular basis to reduce stress and maintain and enhance our health and well-being*

• Similar but different from using *coping strategies*

• Important for EVERYONE!
What is self-care?

- Includes lots of different activities
- Looks different for everyone

Source: https://www.olgaphoenix.com/
Why is self-care important for caregivers?

- All caregivers juggle many demands
- Caregivers of children and adults with Spina Bifida tend to juggle even more!
- While families of individuals with Spina Bifida are resilient, caregivers may be more likely to experience stress, depression, and anxiety for various reasons
- Research shows self-care improves our emotional/psychological well-being!
Why is self-care more important NOW?

• COVID-19 threatens lives and LIVELIHOOD!
• Stress, uncertainty, loss of control, grief/loss, isolation
• Working from home or loss of work, e-learning
• Families of individuals with health care needs may face even more challenges, including disruptions to:
  • Medical care, home health care, medical supplies
  • Special education, therapies
  • Social engagement
  • … and more
What gets in the way of self-care?

• **Doubt**
  - “It’s just another thing I have to do.”
  - “It’s not going to make much of a difference…It won’t really help.”
  - “I’m too busy; there’s not enough time.”
  - “I’m just too tired.”
  - “I don’t have the money to practice self-care”

• **Guilt**
  - “It’s selfish to focus on myself.”
  - “My family’s needs must come before mine.”
Why is self-care important for caregivers?

• If you don’t prioritize your well-being, who will?
• If you’re not okay, how can you help your children be okay?
• Taking care of ourselves models an important life skill for our children
• Our families want us to feel good too
• “Self care is not about self-indulgence, it’s about self-preservation.” - Audre Lorde

“...Place the oxygen mask on yourself first before helping children or others who may need your assistance.”
How self-care needs change over time

- Our caregiving capacities change over time
- Our relationship with our child changes over time
- In general, caregiving-related stress stays somewhat constant
  - Points to individual differences in how caregivers cope with stress
    - Points to the importance of stress management and SELF-CARE!
How self-care needs change over time

• How we find time may change
  • *May* have more flexibility as our children get older

• The self-care activity may change
  • Our needs/interests may change
  • Our children/partners may join us!

• The importance of self-care may change
  • The harder it rains, the more we need our umbrella!
How to practice self-care

• Lots of options!

**Physical**
- Stick to a sleep schedule
- Eat healthily/ practice mindful eating
- Exercise
- Swim, walk, run, play sports, dance
- Yoga, stretch
- Take dog for a walk
- Get a massage
- Be intimate with partner
- Take time off when sick

**Psychological**
- Meditate
- Practice mindfulness
- Practice relaxation (guided imagery, deep breathing)
- Journal
- Practice gratitude
- Go to therapy
- Join a support group (in-person or online)
- Say “no” to extra responsibilities
- Take day trip/mini-vacation/vacation/staycation
- Turn off your email

**Relationships/Social**
- Schedule a family activity/event
- Go on a date with partner
- Get together with a friend
- Call/text a friend or relative
- Spend time playing with pet
- Join a meet-up/special interest group (book club)
- Send greeting cards
- Volunteer
- Ask someone for help
How to practice self-care

• Lots of options!

**General**
- Take up a hobby (old or new)
- Build something
- Start a creative task
- Watch favorite movie/TV show
- Read an interesting book
- Listen to a podcast
- Play a phone/computer game
- Do a puzzle
- Pamper yourself
- Buy yourself something
- Schedule alone time
- Garden
- Spend time in nature
- Learn about something new
- Wear a fun outfit

**Spiritual**
- Pray
- Attend church
- Spend time in nature

**Emotional**
- Say affirmations, give self-praise
- Find things that make you laugh
- Do something fun or exciting
- Allow yourself to cry
- Express your passion through social action (write a letter, donate, participate in marches)

**Workplace/Professional**
- Take a true lunch break
- Chat with a coworker
- Decorate your workspace
- Delegate tasks
Okay, but how do I really practice self-care?

✓ Create a grocery list of options that work for you

✓ What makes me feel good emotionally, mentally, physically?

✓ Start with the basics – things you already have to do! (for example, sleep and nutrition)

✓ Start small – 15 minutes a day (1% of your day!)

✓ Make it part of your routine… but allow spontaneity!
Okay, but how do I really practice self-care?

✓ Do what you want and would look forward to... if it starts to feel too obligatory, try something else!

✓ Stay consistent with what you do, or mix it up!

✓ Not all self-care tasks are created equal! Sometimes Candy Crush will meet yours needs, but sometimes it won’t!
Okay, but how do I *really* practice self-care?

✓ Sometimes self-care and obligations overlap, and that’s okay! (the “fun” chores)

✓ Self-care doesn’t have to be a solitary activity free of your children and family!
Self-care during COVID-19

- What is doing my “best” look like TODAY?
- What do I need to do today and what can wait?
- What do I need to do today in order to feel like today was a success?
Self-care during COVID-19

• What can I do for others today that will also help me?

• What is the best time today for me to update myself on the news?
Taking care of yourself doesn’t mean ‘me first’
It means ‘me too’

Self-care is giving the world the best of you, instead of what’s left of you.
Katie Reed

You are not required to set yourself on fire to keep other people warm.

To be a good parent, you need to take care of yourself so that you can have the physical and emotional energy to take care of your family.

You owe yourself the love that you so freely give others

“Almost everything will work again if you unplug it for a few minutes, including you.”
— Anne Lamott

An empty tank will take you exactly nowhere.
Take time to refuel.

It’s not selfish to take care of yourself.
A healthier, stronger, happier you is better able to care for those depending on you.
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• Resources for coping with anxiety related to COVID-19: Virusanxiety.com

• The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) COVID-19 family resources: https://www.nctsn.org/what-is-child-trauma/trauma-types/disasters/pandemic-resources

Resources: spinabifidaassociation.org/covid19/

• Apps:
  • Breathe2Relax
  • Calm
  • Headspace
  • Woebot
  • Motivation

• Worksheets and handouts
THANK YOU!

Additional Resources Available at

spinabifidaassociation.org/covid19