



Grady County OHCE Leaders Lesson

March 2015 Leaders Guide

Tips for Family Caregivers

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Purpose: The purpose of this lesson is to introduce and reinforce the need to care for oneself as a caregiver. One out of five adults have some type of caregiving responsibilities. The average American female will spend more time caring for older relatives than raising minor children. The “tips for caregivers” which are shared in this lesson may help OHCE members to care for themselves as a caregiver or help relatives or friends as a support system.

Leaders:

1. Please read this complete lesson. This lesson is designed to **highlight** some of the points under each heading rather than read the lesson word for word to your members.
2. Please read the suggested activities and incorporate them before, during or after the lesson. You may choose to use one, two, or three activities. Or, you may design your own to introduce and reinforce the lesson.
3. A copy of “Prepare to Care” is in this packet as a tool to use during the lesson or share with someone at your group that may be struggling with caregiving or preparing for caregiving. You may want to use it as a “door prize” to reinforce this lesson. More copies are available at: <http://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/home-and-family/caregiving/2012-10/prepare-to-care-lores.pdf>

Nine Ways to Make Caregiving Easier:

These suggestions were extracted from the AARP website. The AARP website provides many resources for caregivers who are struggling to try to balance family and life demands.

- ◆ **Don't suffer in silence.** If you feel you're taking on more than you can manage, let your siblings and other family members know. No one can read your mind and others may not realize that you're overwhelmed or even know how much you're doing. Tell them — calmly, without accusation or blame. Spell out what they can do: grocery shopping, driving to medical appointments, covering your carpool day, or even treating you to dinner and a movie.
- ◆ **Do stay organized.** Create a master contact list (names, phone numbers, emails) of nearby friends, neighbors, doctors, faith leaders, housing managers or apartment front-desk staff, and the local pharmacist, who can be reached in the event of an emergency. Give this to all family members and post a copy where everyone in the house can see it.
- ◆ **Don't feel guilty if you don't live nearby.** Regret weighs heavily on long-distant caregivers, who often shift their schedules, miss work, spend huge amounts of money and time on travel, plus hours talking to doctors and financial experts. This is not your fault. Hire a geriatric care manager you trust to help coordinate local care services; you can find someone through the National Association of Professional Geriatric Care Managers. Additionally, there are several services that can help alert you if your parent isn't active during the day. Your local post office may have a free Carrier Alert program, where letter carriers will notify you or a designated agency when mail hasn't been picked up. Many local agencies telephone isolated people daily to check on their well being. New technology can alert you if your parent hasn't been moving around the house.

- ◆ **Do join a support group.** Online or in your community. Every caregiver needs a talking buddy to listen while she vents. Even better are those who have been there, done that. Support groups can give you guidance, tips and solace. So can friends and co-workers who have been down this road. So if you need help, or someone to hug, ask.
- ◆ **Don't forego sleep.** No one — not even you — can function when sleep deprived. Sleep loss cripples your ability to concentrate, solve problems and remember. Try to get eight hours a night. Nap when the person you're caring for does. Ask someone to come over for a few hours or take Mom to a respite care program at a center for an afternoon. She may enjoy it. And you'll be much better.
- ◆ **Do find time for yourself.** Join a book club or other activity that brings you joy. Even if you've only read the prologue, keeping up with the activities and relationships that stimulate your mind and soul is essential. And remember to exercise. It not only keeps the body in shape, it keeps the brain sharp, too. If you can't get to the gym, buy a DVD of a yoga or exercise class. Ask a friend to pinch hit for you while you walk or jog for 30 minutes. Find ways to make it happen.
- ◆ **Don't neglect your family.** Yes, your aging parent needs you, but so does your spouse. Consider hiring a night caregiver a few times a month so you can go for dinner and a movie or better yet, an overnight vacation. Explain the situation to your children so they understand your schedule and try to find special time to be with them and your friends.
- ◆ **Do learn your options.** If your caregiving responsibilities become too much to handle with your job, consider adjusting your work schedule if possible. Employees covered under the federal Family and Medical Leave Act may be able to take up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave per year to care for relatives. Check with HR about options for leave or flextime, job-sharing or telecommute policies that could make your life easier.
- ◆ **Don't overlook the benefits.** Though caregiving has myriad challenges, it also offers many rewards: Most caregivers agree that the experience strengthened their relationship with a parent. It often brings both caregiver and parent to a new level of understanding in their relationship even if it was a strained connection over the years. You know you're doing the right thing and you have the opportunity to give back to a parent who gave so much to you. Take a few moments each day to reflect on the positive aspects of being a caregiver.

Caregiving Stress Busters

Serving as a caregiver can take a huge toll on your health. These six ways will help you cope and remain strong as you care for a sick loved one. (Source: AARP.com.)

- ⇒ **Make the freezer your friend.** "Telling caregivers to 'eat right' is useless advice," says Washington, D.C., dietitian Katherine Tallmadge. Caregivers usually know *what* to eat; they just don't have time to cook healthier meals. Her answer: batch cooking, which lets you freeze individual portions that you can eat during the week. She tells harried caregivers to make a big pot of a hearty, all-in-one meal like a soup with meat, beans and vegetables, or a stew.
- ⇒ **Mix in Meditation.** Twelve minutes of daily meditation can dramatically improve the mental health of caregivers, report UCLA researchers. In that study, 65 percent of family caregivers who practiced a chanting yogic meditation called Kirtan Kriya every day for eight weeks saw a 50 percent improvement on a depression-rating scale. Meditation also increased telomerase activity — a sign that cellular aging had slowed, says study author Helen Lavretsky, M.D.
- ⇒ **Stockpile Healthy Snacks.** Nutritious foods you can grab on the run help keep blood sugar levels on an even keel and energy levels from flagging, says Tallmadge. She nixes the typical granola

bars — "too high in sugar" — opting instead for what she calls "real food" with hunger-busting protein. That means a handful of whole almonds or a PB&J sandwich. Plus, [healthy snacks](#) are a good way to add more fruits, vegetables and fiber to your diet.

- ⇒ **Slow Down.** Whether it's heating up food for dinner or helping someone in the bathroom, the advice is the same: Don't rush. "It sounds obvious, but when you're stressed and distracted, you're more prone to having accidents. What you don't need is to cut or burn yourself, or slip in the tub," says Karen Rowinsky, an Overland Park, Kansas, social worker who specializes in caregiver counseling. Such accidents can be a warning sign that you're at your limit, a 2006 study finds.
- ⇒ **Volunteer.** This may seem counterintuitive — you're already doing so much to help your family member. But helping out in a different way, in a different setting, can be gratifying and therapeutic, says Barry J. Jacobs, Psy.D., author of *The Emotional Survival Guide for Caregivers*: "One woman told me she volunteers weekly at an animal shelter because the pets are so responsive." Plus, volunteers live longer than nonvolunteers, a University of Michigan study found last year.
- ⇒ **Improve Your Sleep Habits.** Disrupted sleep saps your energy for dealing with the demands of caregiving, says Cleveland Clinic geriatrician Ronan Factora, M.D. Brain scans of sleep-deprived patients in the University of California, Berkeley's sleep lab also found that brain measures of anxiety shot up by more than 60 percent in those who were the most fatigued. So adopt good sleep habits — a dark room, fewer distractions in the bedroom — for more restful sleep.

RESOURCES:

Call 2-1-1:

- * 2-1-1 Oklahoma is an easy-access systems for information and referral to community services for those who need help and those who provide help. It is designed that when a person dials 2-1-1 from their telephone that they are provided information and referral across the spectrum of human need, including but not limited to rental assistance, food pantries, affordable housing, health resources, child care, after-school programs, caregiver support, financial programs, literacy and job programs.
- * 2-1-1 is an easy to remember, free 24-hour telephone number that connects people with important community services seven days a week, 365 days a year.
- * By dialing 2-1-1 on any landline or cell phone the caller will be connected to a call center serving that particular geographical area.
- * 2-1-1 certified service specialists assess a caller's needs and determine what service providers in that area are best equipped to provided the needed help.
- * 2-1-1 specialist refer the caller directly to appropriate service providers.
- * 2-1-1 serves as a portal for emergency disaster response information, relieving the burden on 9-1-1 for non-life threatening calls and giving emergency responders a way to reach the public with accurate, real-time information.

Alzheimer's Association

- * [Www.alz.org](http://www.alz.org). 1-800-272-3900. Information and support for people with Alzheimer's diseases and their caregivers. Operates a 24/7 helpline and care navigator tools.

Alzheimer.gov

- * [Www.alzheimers.gov](http://www.alzheimers.gov). The government free information resource about Alzheimer's disease and related dementias.

ARCH Respite Network

- * [Www.archrespite.org](http://www.archrespite.org) Find programs aservices that allow caregivers to get a break from caring for a loved one.

Eldercare Locator

- * [Www.eldercare.gov](http://www.eldercare.gov). 1-800-677-1116. Connects caregivers to local services and resources for olde adults and adults with disabilities across the United States.

Activities:

1. *Helping friends who are trying to serve as caregivers can be a challenge because it's difficult to know how to help. Consider this scenario:* You have a friend whose husband has Alzheimer's. She is looking stressed and tired and you are concerned that she may need a break from her caregiving duties. What can you or your group do to help your friend during this stress filled time?
2. *Long distance caregiving is more common. Aging parents and children do not sometimes live near each other. Consider what you may do as a caregiver in this scenario:* You are trying to care for your mother who does not live near you—in other words a long distance caregiver. What steps can you take to insure that someone is checking on your mother daily? How do you discover other resources available for her which are close to her home?
3. *There are strengths in numbers. Consider how your group can help in this situation:* Your local group treasurer's father has been diagnosed with cancer and will require many hospital stays and doctor appointments. What can your group do to support your local group treasurer during this difficult time?

Conclusion:

Caring for loved ones and taking care of oneself in the process is challenging. Friends, relatives, and support groups such as OHCE can serve a major role in supporting friends, relatives, and group members during challenging times. It is recommended that OHCE members visit the AARP website to learn more about how to support caregivers and to prepare to care.

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Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Director of Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma. This publication is printed and issued by Oklahoma State University as authorized by the Dean of the Division of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources and has been prepared and distributed at a cost of 20 cents per copy. 02/15 (SGR).

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