



Signs You Need Support

By Cassandra Van Dyck

Have you ever spent time with someone you care for dearly and thought, “I think they need some help.” What triggered that thought? It’s likely you noticed that they seemed tired or scattered. Their emotions might have been heightened. Maybe they seemed sad, or angry, or more frustrated with things than they usually are. You probably could see clearly how they ended up in that state – from saying “yes” to one too many responsibilities or from the emotional exhaustion that comes from trying times. If you’ve been in this situation before, you’ve likely felt compassion for your loved one and had suggestions for how they could ease their burdens and get some support.

It isn’t hard for us to support the people we care about and see, from a place of compassion, that they may need some extra support. So, why is it so hard for us to do that for ourselves?

If you are caring for a loved one, there will come a time when you need some extra support. No one can do it all on their own.

When you’re a caregiver, demands and emotions can slowly mound. You might start helping by doing a task here and there, and then soon find yourself forgetting things because there’s so much on your plate. Caring for someone you love who is suffering from illness or a disability may seem emotionally manageable at first, but you might notice you’re more emotional than you used to be, or that other feelings are prominent, such as frustration and anger. When these behaviours and thoughts creep in, it can feel like you’re failing. You might look around at other people in similar situations and think that if they’re able to handle things, then you should be

able to as well. Talking about emotions with other people might be hard for you, and that fear might be preventing you from reaching out.

Here's something else that you have probably heard a thousand times, and that you'll probably agree with: in order to help other people to the best of your abilities, you must first take care of yourself. To put it another way, taking the time get support when you're struggling will not only help you, it will help the person you're caring for as well.

The first step in getting support when you're having a hard time is to recognize that you need help. As mentioned, sometimes things can mound slowly, and you may not even realize that you need help. If you're having any of the following feelings or experiences, it might be time to reach out. Below are some signs that it may be time to get some extra support.

FORGETFULNESS | You might notice that you're misplacing your keys more than normal, or forgetting appointments.

HEIGHTENED EMOTIONS | You could be feeling sadder than you normally do, or increasingly frustrated, irritated, or angry.

DISRUPTED SLEEP | You might be having trouble falling asleep or staying asleep.

LACK OF JOY | You might not be making time to see friends or do the activities that make you happy.

You might be tempted to accept that these feelings and experiences are simply part of your caregiving journey, but this is an invitation to resist that temptation. Accessing support and practicing self-compassion can help balance your outlook and help you build resiliency.

Continuing to push yourself past your limit for too long puts you at risk of burnout. Burnout occurs when you are physically, emotionally, and mentally exhausted. Some signs of burnout include:

CHRONIC FATIGUE OR IMSOMNIA | You feel tired all the time, even after hours of sleep, or you're having trouble sleeping even when you're very tired.

FORGETFULNESS/IMPAIRED CONCENTRATION | You are having trouble concentrating, even when you're trying very hard to.

PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS | You're getting headaches, stomach upset, or you're getting colds and flus more often.

CHANGES IN APPETITE | You're eating more or less than you used to.

ANXIETY | You feel nervous or uneasy often or all the time. You're constantly worrying.

DEPRESSION | You feel sad and hopeless and a lack of motivation.

ANGER | You notice that you feel angry often, even towards people or things that don't usually make you upset.

If you are reading this and noticing that you are experiencing some or many of the symptoms of burnout, remember to feel compassion for yourself in this moment. Realizing that you are in a tough place can be very hard. Take a deep breath, send yourself some love, and then promise yourself that you will reach out for help.

Getting support can look like a lot of things, depending on where you're at on your journey. If you read the list of signs that some extra support is needed and thought some of them applied to you, consider doing a few of the following things:

Call a trusted friend and ask them to go for a walk or for coffee. Let them know how you're doing.

Access a local network group and get to know some other caregivers. NSCR offers bi-monthly network groups! Take a look at our events page for details.

Practice self-care every day. Make taking care of yourself a priority and schedule time to do something that makes you happy, even for 10 minutes.

If you noticed that you're experiencing symptoms of burnout, it's important to reach out to someone as soon as possible. Talk to a health care professional. If you are on the North Shore, the Kelty Dennehy Mental Health Centre is a great resource. Consider calling the Mental Health Support line at (604) 310-6789.