



RESOURCES

7 TIPS FOR CAREGIVERS

With all the focus on the folks who suffered through trauma and are coping with PTSD, there are heroes who are overlooked, namely the caregivers. The VA Caregiver Support Program cites that: **17%** of all Caregivers in the American population are caring for veterans.

70% are women caring for their spouse or partner, while 1 in 4 provide care for their veteran son or daughter

41% are caring for veterans 18-54 years old

Caregivers caring for those with PTSD often don't realize that they are caregivers, believing that physically caring for a sick or bedridden relative is the only way to be a caregiver. Caregivers do much more, including running errands, picking up meds, going to doctor and other appointments, taking care of bills, and supervising and monitoring daily activities. Disabled American Veterans (DAV) recently launched a national campaign called *Unsung Heroes* to recognize sacrifices and challenges of veteran caregivers. Dennis Joyner, DAV National Commander, stated in the July/August 2017 Issue of

WHAT CAN CAREGIVERS DO AND WHAT CAN OTHERS DO TO SUPPORT THEM?

1

FEELING STRESSED

When you feel stressed, recognize that your feelings matter, and reach out for help and support. A good place to start is by involving other family members. This can help relatives understand the severity of the problem, and therefore lead to better care.

2

KEEP A SCHEDULE

Keep a schedule not just for your loved one's appointments but for your needs and time as well. It's important that everyone is on the same page. Stress has no boundaries and everyone associated with care has to be taken into consideration, not just the patient.

3

CARE FOR YOURSELF

Understand that caring for someone who has been through trauma is traumatic for you too. As a caregiver, it's hard to manage the patient and not get emotionally attached. The ability to separate your personal feelings from your professional feelings is key to staying attached but also being free of emotional baggage from caregiving.



OF PEOPLE WITH PTSD



By Dan Pitzer

DAV Magazine that “They (Caregivers) handle a lot of basic things in life that are just normal for others.” “ Normal is not a standard way of life for us, and without our caregivers it would be very difficult.” The VA has a caregiver program for post 9/11 veterans that provides compensation, training, and support, and DAV is backing a new bill to include caregivers from all service periods.

Caregivers have usually been thrust into their roles without really knowing of the enormity of their tasks, and need support from others. The VA Caregiver program cites studies that show caregiving takes a toll on physical and emotional health, with caregivers more likely to suffer from depression than their peers. This research shows that 88% report increased stress and anxiety, 77% report sleep deprivation, and healthy self care behaviors decline for roughly 6 out of 10. People who care for their spouses are more prone to caregiving related stress than those who care for other family members. For PTSD in particular, caregivers and providers often deal with Secondary Traumatic Stress, which is absorbing and experiencing the trauma that the loved ones and patients have through frequent contact and disclosure of experiences and feelings. This can lead to hyperarousal, intrusive symptoms, avoidance or emotional “numbing,” anxiety and depression.

4

SET GOALS

Set realistic goals, understanding what you can and cannot manage by educating yourself on PTSD and any other conditions your loved one is dealing with. Research the many traits of PTSD. That will help you realize triggers and provide a route to avoiding situations that may cause an episode.



5

FUN MEMORIES

Write down the things you have always loved to do for fun. Note how many of them you have stopped doing, and schedule them regularly; don't wait till you “get around to it.” It goes back to making sure you are caring for yourself as much as you are caring for the loved one.

6

TRY THERAPY

Get into therapy for yourself, utilizing caregiver support programs or a therapist of your choice. Don't underestimate secondary traumatic stress. It's very similar to secondhand smoke and cancer. When you are close to someone with PTSD it's easy to get mental scars.



7

GIVE BACK

If you are a friend or family member of a Caregiver, offer to help, make plans for a night out and take care of all the arrangements. The caregiver may need to be convinced to participate but taking care of them for a change can make a huge difference in their well-being.



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