



Careferth

**When Roles Reverse:  
Caring for the One  
Who Cared for You**

A Guide to the Personal  
Side of Caregiving

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Finding the Good





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## Introduction

Caring for someone you love can bring out your best—kindness, patience, and love. It can also bring out your harder sides—frustration, anger, or impatience. And when the person you're caring for is a parent or someone who once supported you, the experience can feel even more emotional. Roles begin to shift. The ground beneath you changes. What once felt familiar may suddenly feel new again. Every moment along your caregiving journey is different, simply because of the uniqueness of you and your loved one, and the different tasks that each day can bring. Caregiving has many twists and turns. Some you expect, others surprise you.

Remember: whatever you feel right now is okay—and it won't last forever.

New challenges, new opportunities, and new versions of you and your loved one show up each day. At Careforth, we understand and are here to help you face your ever-changing role as a caregiver. Trust that being here right now is exactly where you need to be. This guide will help you notice your feelings, understand what sets you off, and find healthy ways to cope. And always remember, Careforth is here as your partner, your confidant, and your coach in all things caregiving.

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## SECTION 1

# Past, Present, and Future

At Careforth, we see that there's always an important place for the past, the present, and the future when it comes to caregiving. When roles begin to reverse and you find yourself caring for a parent or loved one who once guided you, the past can take on new meaning, the present can feel fuller, and the future can feel more urgent. There's much to learn from what came before. There are wonderful and challenging things happening in the present moment. And there are preparations we can make today that will lighten the load for tomorrow.

## The Past

Caregiving often brings up memories of your past together—vacations, holidays, or just everyday life. No matter where your loved one's physical, emotional, or mental well-being is today, you'll always make comparisons to earlier versions of them and past versions of you.

Seeing your loved one change and evolve through a complex diagnosis or as they age can make you shy away from your past; however, taking a trip down memory lane, either alone or with your loved one, has great benefits. Research shows that storytelling, making a family recipe together, or watching a favorite old movie can be especially beneficial for dementia patients and can help you reconnect with your loved one. Look through pictures, tell stories, or read old emails or letters, either with your loved one or in quiet moments by yourself.

For some, revisiting past memories and experiences is easy, carefree, and fun. For others, it can force you to rehash grief, relationship battles, or times of estrangement. If you're struggling with a complex and heavy past, make sure you seek out the professional support you need to take care of you.

## Ideas for Time Traveling to your Past



Watch a favorite movie from your childhood



Read old journals or diaries



Search your email box for old notes to or from your loved one



Visit places that hold positive memories for you



Listen to a song or album you loved during an earlier stage of life



Look at pictures from your favorite trips or events

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## The Present

While current moments in caregiving can feel urgent and heavy, filled with decisions, doctor's appointments, and daily care tasks, there's a lot to appreciate about the present. Introducing a few habits into your day can help you stay in the moment and find more fulfillment in caregiving and in life.

### 1 Fun for the win

Find ways to bring more fun into your day. If you already know what fills your soul or makes you laugh, start making your list and commit to doing them daily. If you're not sure, use one of our suggestions to find some brand-new fun. Often, the worse you are at a new hobby, the more fun you'll have!

### 2 Moments of peace

Small moments can have a big impact. A brief walk, a new book, or a short phone call with a close friend. Live in the present moment, even if it's just for a few moments!

### 3 Mindfulness practices

Try deep breathing, stretching, yoga, or a 5-minute meditation on YouTube. Simply getting oxygen to your brain and working to quiet your mind can bring you back to the present moment and help you feel more gratitude for the right here and the right now.



## Finding Joy & FUNfillment



Take a class at a local art or community center



Cook a new recipe



Say "Yes!" to something you'd typically turn down



Ask a neighbor or friend to introduce you to their hobby or teach you a new skill

## The Future

There are critical things you can do today so you can be well prepared for whatever life may bring, which include home safety, emergency planning, legal and financial preparedness, and end of life wishes. Careforth has numerous resources in place to help you feel ready for whatever your future holds.

- Careforth's [Home Safety Hazards Every Caregiver Should Know](#)
- Careforth's [Family Caregiving Emergencies](#)
- Chapter 10 (Planning Ahead) from [The Family Caregiver Starter Kit](#).

Trust that the work you do now can help you feel more prepared for the path ahead.

Look how far you've come by understanding your past. Appreciate how hard you've worked to get to this present moment. And realize that there are things you can do today to make the future a little simpler.

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## SECTION 2

# Understanding Your Feelings

In the past, many of us were taught to hide tough feelings. Advice like, “don’t think about it anymore,” “move on,” or “find a distraction,” was common when handling hard times or challenging emotions.

When feelings get so big and heavy that you feel stuck in them like quicksand, try skipping that drink or putting down your phone for a few minutes. These few simple steps can make all the difference between staying stuck and moving through the muck.

1

### Journal

Write down or talk about how you’re feeling. Simply grab a pen and paper, record yourself using your phone’s audio/visual features, or type it out in an online journal or note taking app. Don’t worry about having the exact right words or correcting your grammar, spelling, and punctuation – just get it out of your head.

2

### Name them

Read back on your entry or listen to your recording. Pretend you’re an outsider studying this information on someone you don’t know. What words stand out to you? What emotions do you hear that may or may not have been said? If you feel unable to name the emotions, use resources like Brene Brown’s [Atlas of the Heart List of Emotions](#) or the Hoffman Institute’s [Feelings List](#).

3

### Identify why you’re feeling that way

See if you can find the root cause of those complex feelings. What happened recently? Did someone say something or not say something? How did someone else’s presence make it worse? What image, sound, or smell triggered that feeling?

4

### Find active coping strategies

Making a list, developing a plan, meditating, or going for a walk are all ways to cope in productive and helpful ways. Consider implementing one of these ideas the next time you find yourself trying to push down big feelings, because they help you calm your mind and plot your next steps.

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## SECTION 3

# Knowing When to Push or Pause

Every caregiver has moments of strength—and moments of exhaustion. It's okay to pause. Being strong doesn't mean doing it all alone. While being a committed, persistent, and resilient caregiver is considered positive, it's critical to watch out for red flags indicating you're pushing yourself to burnout.

### When Pushing Through Helps

Some days are just hard. But working through tough moments teaches you things about yourself and your loved one. Each challenge you face makes you more ready for the next one.

Your commitment to care for your loved one—even when it's difficult—shows real strength. You keep showing up. You keep trying. That takes courage.

### When It's Time to Pause

But there's a difference between pushing through a hard day and pushing yourself toward burnout. Here are signs you need to pause and get help:

- You feel tired all the time, even after sleeping
- You're getting sick more often
- You feel angry or frustrated most days
- You're pulling away from friends and family
- You've stopped doing things you used to enjoy
- You feel hopeless or trapped

If you're seeing these signs, it's time to ask for help. This isn't giving up—it's being smart about your health.

## Building Your Safety Net Before You Need It

The best time to plan for help is before you're desperate for it. Think of it like stocking a first aid kit before anyone gets hurt.

### Here's what to do:

- 1 Make a list of helpers**  
Who can step in when you need a break? Family, friends, neighbors, or professional services?
- 2 Create a respite plan**  
Schedule regular breaks, even short ones. An hour, an afternoon, a full day. Put them on the calendar.
- 3 Know your resources**  
Research local support services, respite care options, and caregiver support groups now, so you know where to turn later.

**Remember: Taking care of yourself isn't selfish. It's how you keep being able to take care of your loved one.**

### Careforth Resiliency Reads

- [Understanding Caregiving Disappointment](#)
- [Maintaining Your Own Life While Being a Family Caregiver](#)
- [Why Caregivers Need Respite Care and How to Take Advantage of it](#)
- [Building a Strong Family Caregiving Support Network](#)

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## SECTION 4

# Managing Stress

Stress is normal—it just means your body and mind need attention. Everyone feels it differently. Maybe you can't sleep, your stomach hurts, or your mind won't stop racing. Try this three-step process to better understand what causes your stress and how to move through it.

### 1 Acknowledge it

Stress is a natural human emotion. It's not a sign of weakness or something to feel ashamed about. Accept that it is like a chatty neighbor who shows up at your doorstep when you are already in a hurry. Try speaking out loud to yourself next time you feel stress in your body. "This is stress showing up. I will not feel this way forever."

### 2 Find where it shows up

Some [common indications of stress](#) might be trouble sleeping, persistent tiredness, grinding your teeth, head and body pain, stomach aches, and digestive issues. If you're

feeling sad, anxious, angry, or stressed, take a moment to check in with your body. Where are the physical indications showing up in your body? Is it a pit in your stomach? Pain behind your eyes? Or a fuzzy brain? Identifying where stress impacts you most can make it easier to identify in the future.

### 3 Find the source

A powerful stress fighter is pinpointing what brought it on, also known as identifying your "triggers." While big life changes, like moving, losing a family member, or managing financial complexities, can cause sudden stress, sometimes the small things add up, too. Serving numerous roles in a household (like chef, shopper, scheduler, driver, and supporter), means there's a lot on your back and people are relying on you. Often, the weight of daily life is already heavy, so something small like an extra errand, a delayed doctor's appointment, or an unexpected visitor can be the final straw for your stress.

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Finding your triggers and identifying ways to decrease their impact can better prepare you for future stressful events. Read up on [common triggers](#), see if you can think back to what has set

you off in the past, or check in with how you're feeling now. Then, find a coping strategy that may help next time you're triggered.

EXAMPLE	
Trigger	Potential Solutions
<p><b>Having to wait</b></p> <p>[prescription isn't ready yet, doctor is running late, food order is taking forever]</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Play a brain game on my phone</li> <li>• Call a friend to catch up</li> <li>• Start my grocery list</li> <li>• Put in ear plugs and meditate</li> </ul>

### Stress Coping Activities



Physical movement, like walking, running, yoga, or stretching



Get creative by writing, painting, sculpting, drawing, or knitting



Meditation, mindfulness, or breathing practices (Life hack: YouTube is a great resource for quick practices; simply search based on how much time you have)



Do a brainy game, like a puzzle, crossword, or word find



## SECTION 5

# Finding the Good

Our brains like to focus on problems. It's how we're wired. You might remember the one thing that went wrong today instead of the ten things that went right. The stressful doctor's appointment instead of the sweet moment you shared afterward.

The good news? You can train your brain to notice the good stuff too. It takes practice, but it works. Scientists call it "breaking the negativity cycle." We call it finding reasons to keep going.

### A Simple Exercise to Rewrite Negative Thoughts

**Take 5 minutes in a quiet space** with a notebook or journal.

**Write down the negative thoughts** running through your mind.

Example: "I will never be able to take care of my mom the way she deserves."

**Say out loud: "Stop! That's not true."**

**Rewrite your thoughts into 3-5 positive statements**

- "I am completely capable of taking care of my mom the way she deserves."
- "I get better at being my mom's caregiver with every passing day."
- "I have come so far in making sure my mom is well-cared for."
- "Every time I do something to support my mom, I'm learning more about how to be the best caregiver I can be for her."

**Remember: You don't have to be positive all the time. You just need to practice noticing what's going well.**



### Other Ways to Find the Good

#### Keep a gratitude journal

Jot down a few good things that happened each day

#### Create a visual board

Fill it with images and words that bring you joy and encouragement

#### Find a reason to laugh

Watch a comedian, listen to a funny podcast, or call your most hilarious friend

#### Start your day with positive self-talk

Make up your own affirmations or try these:

- "I have everything I need to make today a great day."
- "I am living to my full potential."
- "I am, and will always be, enough."
- "I choose to focus on what I can control and let go of what I can't."
- "Every day, in every way, I am getting better and better."

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## SECTION 6

# Reflecting on Your Journey

It's important to stop and look around every so often. Give yourself credit for how far you've come, how much you've accomplished, and how significantly you and your loved one have grown, both individually and together. Take a few quiet minutes to think about your journey. Write or just think through your answers. There's no right or wrong—just honesty and care for yourself.

1. What is the biggest hurdle you've overcome as a caregiver?
2. What has been your loved one's greatest accomplishment recently?
3. What were some of your challenges in the early days of caregiving? Are those still your same challenges today?
4. In what ways have you grown as a caregiver from the start of your journey to today?
5. Which experiences, people, or places have brought you peace and joy when things were most difficult?
6. What did you do the last time something felt impossible?
7. Use three words to describe your caregiving journey. Explain why you used these particular words.
8. What part of caregiving makes you the proudest?
9. If there were three caregiving tasks you could give to someone else, what would they be?
10. If time were limitless, what are three things you would do today to bring yourself joy?

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# Resources and References

## Role of the Past, Present, & Future

- [Why People with Alzheimer’s Disease Might Live in the Past, Banner Health](#)
- [Home Safety Hazards Every Caregiver Should Know, Careforth](#)
- [Family Caregiving Emergencies, Careforth](#)
- [The Family Caregiver Starter Kit \[Chapter 10: Planning Ahead\], Careforth](#)

## Emotional Avoidance

- [Avoidance Coping and Why It Creates Additional Stress, Very Well Mind](#)
- [Understanding Emotional Avoidance and Learning to Tolerate Uncomfortable Feelings, Anxiety & Depression Association of America](#)
- [Atlas of the Heart List of Emotions, Brene Brown](#)
- [Feelings List, The Hoffman Institute](#)

## Resilience in Caregiving

- [What is Caregiver Burnout and How to Handle It, Careforth](#)

## Stress Triggers and Solutions

- [Stress, Cleveland Clinic](#)
- [7 Types of Triggers and 7 Coping Strategies, Care Counseling](#)
- [Caregiver stress: Tips for taking care of yourself, Mayo Clinic](#)

## Positivity Practices:

- [Five Tips to Train Yourself to Think Positively, Walden University](#)
- [How Visualization Can Benefit Your Well-Being, Psychology Today](#)
- [How to be more positive? Try these 10 positive mindset tips, Calm.com](#)
- [8 Things to Tell Yourself Every Morning, Mel Robbins](#)

## Conclusion

All your feelings are real and important. They show you how you’re doing right now. They may change in a few hours or days, but what you do with them—how you care for yourself—will stay with you.

However, the actions you take today to unpack your feelings can make the future lighter and brighter. Every step you take toward actively thinking about your emotions, understanding why they are showing up, and learning how to move through them is key to your mental and physical well-being. Simple and consistent proactive habits, like practicing mindfulness, building your social and resource networks, and working toward a more positive mindset can help you be a more patient person, both for yourself and for your loved one.

And always remember that you have others with you along your caregiver journey. Careforth’s job is to support caregivers, helping them be the best versions of themselves to provide the highest quality of care for their loved ones. We are always just a **phone call or message away** from being a valuable tool in your caregiver toolkit.

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