

The 7 Pillars of Successful Caregiving

Things No One Tells You

DR. EBONI GREEN

Also by Dr. Eboni Ivory Green

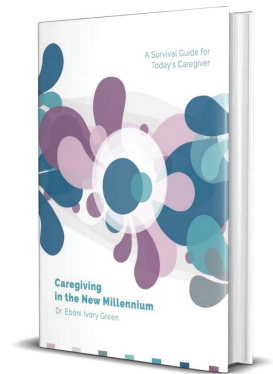
Caregiving: Things You Need to Know

Caregivers are essential, yet are often overlooked.

This book aims to help everyday heroes feel seen while offering invaluable resources and information.

In a world focused on wealth accumulation, self-driven pursuits, and an emphasis on self-mindedness, this book reaches out to those who instead choose to devote their lives to caring for a child, parent, spouse, neighbor, or friend in need. It can be tough to find comprehensive guides that cover most possible situations and solutions. *Caregiving Things You Need to Know* aims to do just that – by arming you with the knowledge you need all in one place.

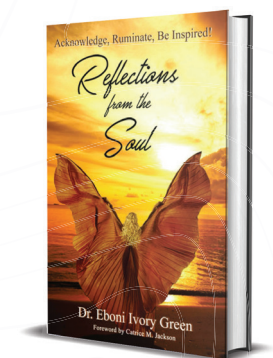
This chapter of your life—whether you're new to caregiving or just need to brush up your knowledge—can be very rewarding, confusing, and amazing. **Get the answers you're looking for** and remember, the world needs more wonderful people like you.



Reflections from the Soul

Reflections from the Soul is a compassionate compass to guide you on the journey as you seek to understand, express, heal, and reconcile your pain and loss. You do not have to travel alone. Dr. Green offers you a soul-map to help you discover meaning in madness, safety in your sorrow, and create peace and purpose from your pain.

Reflections from the Soul lovingly invites you to acknowledge your personal feelings and to accept your sorrow as a normal response to your loss.



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Dedication

Dedicated to the Memory of my father, Jose Luis Torres-Reyes-Superman, my greatest supporter, mentor, and friend.

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INTRODUCTION:

The Art of Caregiving



*Doctors diagnose, nurses heal, and caregivers
make sense of it all.*

BRETT H. LEWIS¹

Premium painting parties. Have you heard of them? A couple of years ago our adult children attended one during a family vacation. Here's how it works: you book an appointment and select a painting outline from a catalog of thousands of options. When you arrive, there is a private room ready for you and your party: it's filled with your selected canvas outline, some paint and brushes, food and drinks, and a dedicated artist to assist. Sounds fun, doesn't it?

Our children loved it! Not only was painting together a great bonding moment for them, but the pride on each of their faces as they took turns showing off their finished paintings is forever imprinted on my heart. However, as I looked closely at each of their paintings, it occurred to me that although each had selected the same canvas outline, their paintings were vastly different.

I had tucked away that memory of my family vacation, one where we were all together, ecstatic and enjoying one another, until I reflected on my thoughts about *The 7 Pillars of Successful Caregiving*. It was then that it occurred to me that the approach you take to caregiving is much like creating a work of art. Nursing theorist Margret Alligood says caring is "a moral principle, not a strategy, procedure, or action."² I agree with Alligood about caring being a moral principle. But I would add that your ability to apply knowledge to meet your loved one or client's unmet needs is a moral principle *in action*. It's a process of creation. It's an art.

¹ Quote by Brett H. Lewis: "Doctors diagnose, nurses heal, and caregivers m..." (goodreads.com)

² Alligood, M.R. (2022). *Nursing theorists and their work* (10th ed.). Elsevier.

Like a canvas outline, *The 7 Pillars of Successful Caregiving* is a framework to refer to whenever needed. Each of the guidelines offered may not work for you in their entirety. That's okay. The beauty of caregiving lies in your uniqueness, potential for self-assessment, and openness to personal growth. For that reason, you are encouraged to select whatever colors, patterns, and designs that speak to you from the framework provided here to make your own caregiving canvas unique and beautiful.



Part 1

The 7 Pillars of Successful Caregiving

*May They Hold You Up
on Your Journey*



01

PILLAR

**SELF-CARE:
The Fuel That
Allows Your Light
To Shine**



Self-care is essential. Put your own oxygen mask on before assisting others.

RANDY PAUSCH³

Alexis is a full-time caregiver for her husband, Shannon, who recently suffered a spinal cord injury following an industrial accident on the family farm; he received a subsequent diagnosis of paraplegia. During an extensive hospital stay, Shannon benefited from physical and occupational therapy to aid in his recovery. He returned home two weeks ago and now depends greatly on his wife to assist with his care needs. However, Alexis finds Shannon's daily routine daunting. She has been assisting him by setting up his bath, helping him dress, preparing meals, and managing his medications. Her daily schedule is filled with doctor's appointments, physical therapy visits, caring for their daughter, and keeping the family farm financially afloat. In fact, she's been so invested in Shannon's recovery and in trying to adjust to a new normal that her usual self-care practices have fallen by the wayside.

One of the more challenging aspects of caring for Shannon is coping with his depression and feelings of despair, which appear to be exacerbated whenever Alexis is in his presence. For example, Alexis recently noticed Shannon's complete lack of interest in performing the tasks he had relearned while receiving physical and occupational therapy. For example, yesterday Shannon would not bathe or shave himself (both of which he can accomplish without assistance). In fact, usually, once Alexis runs the water and sets up the bath supplies, Shannon can bathe himself fully, except for his lower extremities and back. When Alexis asked Shannon why he wasn't bathing, he said, "I can't. You know I can't. You are so insensitive. Sometimes I can't stand you!" He then rolled over and covered his head with his blanket. Alexis did not respond to

3 Randy Pausch, [The Last Lecture Quote by Randy Pausch: "Put on your own oxygen mask before assisting ot..." \(goodreads.com\)](#)



Shannon verbally; instead, she went to the kitchen and cried. Later, when Shannon did not think Alexis could see him, he elevated the head of the bed and started performing his upper body stretching exercises, appearing content. Alexis then entered the room, hoping to speak with him, at which point he abruptly lowered the head of the bed and positioned himself on his side with his back to her.

Months into Shannon's recovery, Alexis is exhausted, frustrated, and grieving the life she once shared with Shannon. When her emotions were exacerbated by today's challenging interaction, Alexis found she was unable to stop crying. Over the past few weeks, Alexis has also had trouble falling asleep — and once she is asleep, she can no longer sleep through the night. Two weeks ago, Alexis started smoking cigarettes again, a habit she had worked hard to overcome when she and Shannon decided to start a family. Alexis is distressed and well on her way to burnout.



What is Burnout?

Burnout occurs when you experience emotional and physical exhaustion after enduring a prolonged period of caregiver distress. As a caregiver, you may have increased stress due to long shifts at work or long caregiving periods, sleep deprivation, and fear or guilt over not providing adequate care. Over time, this can lead to other problems like anger issues, anxiety, and depression. In fact, it is not uncommon to experience physical and emotional distress when you are a caregiver. As a result, you may be at higher risk for developing medical conditions like diabetes, hypertension, heart problems, fatigue, and tension headaches. It is, therefore, important to prevent, recognize, and address the signs of burnout.

What are the Signs of Caregiver Burnout?

The following are signs that you may be experiencing burnout:

- ⇒ Feeling overwhelmed or constantly worried.
- ⇒ Feeling tired most of the time.
- ⇒ Sleeping too much or too little.
- ⇒ Gaining or losing a lot of weight.
- ⇒ Becoming easily irritated or angry.
- ⇒ Losing interest in activities you used to enjoy.
- ⇒ Abusing alcohol or drugs, including prescription medications.
- ⇒ Frequent headaches or bodily pain.⁴

Factors Contributing to Burnout

The table below indicates the factors that most commonly contribute to burnout among family and frontline caregivers. It also suggests some steps you can take to counteract them.



FAMILY CAREGIVER

Saying yes even when you are tired.

It is vital that you learn to say no. You cannot be everything to everyone and nothing to yourself.



FRONTLINE CAREGIVER

Working all the overtime available.

Do not take on additional shifts without careful consideration. You need time with your family and to do things outside of work.

4 [Is It Caregiver Stress or Depression? \(webmd.com\)](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4111111/)



FAMILY CAREGIVER

Not accessing respite care. Every caregiver deserves a break, even you. Caregivers are reported to benefit most from an uninterrupted 8-hour break away from their loved one.

Not asking for help. Many caregivers do not ask for help from family or friends. Be sure to ask for help and *be specific* about what you need.

Not accepting help. Your longevity in your role depends significantly on asking for, and then accepting, help from family, friends, and community members. Allow others to help you.



FRONTLINE CAREGIVER

Working without taking breaks. Take your breaks at work. Many healthcare providers work through their lunch and 15-minute breaks; however, you need that time to reflect and regroup. If you have vacation time, plan something fun, or take time to simply do nothing.

Worrying about work on your days off. Do not focus on work-related problems during your time off. If you are constantly thinking about work problems, you do not actually get a break.

Saying “No one works as hard as me.” Don’t become a martyr. Ask for the help you need to perform your job.



FAMILY CAREGIVER

Being resistant to hiring a professional caregiver. Hiring a professional caregiver will assist with meeting your loved one's care needs. Having additional help will take tasks off your plate and give you the opportunity to simply be.



FRONTLINE CAREGIVER

Doing everything for your client. Save your energy for the tasks that your client is not able to perform rather than trying to do everything for them. Doing everything is not healthy for you or your client.



The Importance of Self-Care

Like Alexis, you may become accustomed to putting the needs of your loved one or client before your own, leaving little time or energy for hobbies, exercise, and other self-care practices. While putting yourself last often feels necessary, it is not sustainable. Therefore, it is important to integrate self-care into your daily routine. Remind yourself that if you prioritize your own health, you will be able to care for your loved one or client much more effectively.

5 Strategies: How to Integrate Self-Care into Your Daily Routine

How can you integrate self-care into your daily routine? The following are five strategies you might use to care for yourself while you care for a loved one or client:

01 Don't Let Anger or Frustration Get the Best of You

02 Practice Positive Self-Talk

03 Put on Your "Oxygen Mask"

04 Meditate

05 Practice Gratitude

Let's discuss what each of these strategies entails further:

01. Don't Let Anger or Frustration Get the Best of You

Having negative thoughts and feelings does not make you a bad person, and it is important not to suppress your feelings. When you are frustrated, you will likely experience physical signs such as a faster heart rate, shortness of breath, rapid breathing, a tight throat, an increase in body temperature, or chest pain. From time to time, you may feel the urge to let your anger loose and vent it at your loved one or client unproductively. Should you start feeling angry, it is important to acknowledge your feelings and then take a step back to calm yourself.

Often when you are angry, it is a response to feeling hurt, disrespected, overworked, or taken for granted. What do you need to care for and affirm yourself at this moment? What tools does the

person receiving your care need to act productively? Don't let anger or frustration get the best of you.

AN EXAMPLE

We might consider Alexis' challenging interaction with Shannon. After Shannon complained about Alexis' perceived lack of sensitivity, Alexis might have stepped away to calm down. Doing so may help her recognize that Shannon's current response is not a reflection of her own failure. She can thus focus on getting to the specific source of his frustration rather than reacting.

You might consider reminding yourself of your worth by practicing positive self-talk.

02. Practice Positive Self-Talk

Positive self-talk is the art of replacing negative thoughts with positive ones. To practice positive self-talk, you will want to make short, simple, positive statements. Additionally, be intentional about being kind to yourself.

AN EXAMPLE

You are a caregiver to Mr. Anderson. Mr. Anderson is always angry. No matter how you approach him, his responses are demanding and demeaning. His negative attitude makes it difficult for you to care for him. Following your last interaction, you are filled with stress and anxiety. Before you engage with him again, you might go into the bathroom, look into the mirror, and say something like: "I can't control what other people think, say, or do. I can only control myself." Another positive statement you can make is, "I can learn from this situation and grow as a person."

A final way to reinforce your self-talk is to work toward setting boundaries with Mr. Anderson. For example, if he says something unkind or inappropriate, you might reply with: "Mr. Anderson, I won't be able to assist you if you are going to be demeaning." Then, be sure you take a moment to assess his unmet needs. Perhaps he is angry because no one asks him how he would like his care tasks performed. When you take the time to

assess the unmet needs of a loved one or client, you can provide solutions to meet those needs.

Additionally, trusting yourself to make a level response can help counter negative energy and reduce anxiety. A combination of setting boundaries and using positive self-talk can be a useful approach to de-escalate what has become a negative situation.

Additional Actions to Take During Positive Self-Talk:

- ⇒ Pay attention to the thoughts that trigger your self-criticism instincts and counter those thoughts with positive ones.
- ⇒ Gain perspective by reaching out to others. Are other caregivers having similar interactions with your loved one or client? Perhaps there is meaning behind the behavior. Talking to care team members and the client directly may help you to problem-solve and build solutions.
- ⇒ Throughout the day, entertain the thought that you deserve kindness, the same way others deserve it.
- ⇒ Practice the art of caring for yourself as you would care for others.

03. Put On Your Oxygen Mask

If you feel you need some time for yourself, listen to your heart and excuse yourself from whatever you are doing. Putting on your “oxygen mask” means taking a moment to breathe and do something that makes you feel relaxed. Everyone deserves a break from their responsibilities. Remember that you cannot help others if you do not take time for yourself. This can be something as simple as making tea, working out, watching your favorite TV show, or spending some time alone. Even if you cannot spend much time on self-care at a given moment due to responsibilities, you can go outside for a few minutes, close your eyes, and let the fresh air touch your cheeks.

Another option is taking a short walk. Start walking ten or twenty feet slowly in a single direction. Once you’ve completed that, turn around and walk back to the starting point. Alternatively, you can also allow yourself to sit in your car alone for a few minutes and listen to your favorite songs.

The purpose of taking a moment to pause and relax is to recenter. Assure yourself that you are going to be okay while temporarily stepping away from the tasks associated with caregiving.

04. Meditate

Meditation is an effective approach to working through distress and preventing burnout. Maintaining your patience is possible even in the most challenging situations if your nerves are calm and you are relaxed. You do not have to opt for guided meditation. All you need to do is close your eyes and envision something that makes you feel calm, such as the ocean, mountains, or another natural landscape or event. When you meditate, it is important that you practice positive self-talk by telling yourself that you are doing amazing work and that you are strong enough to continue doing it in the future. Think about the bright side and the advantages of caregiving. Reflect on why you became a caregiver. Remind yourself of the importance of your journey, despite the hurdles that will come your way.

AN EXAMPLE

Alexis has been having trouble sleeping because of the newfound tension in her body, likely due to her extra physical work on the farm and stress. Before bed, she might take 15 minutes to stretch, close her eyes, and consciously relax her muscles. As she does this, she might remind herself of how calm, patient, and capable she is.

05. Practice Gratitude

Practicing gratitude requires taking the time to appreciate and reflect on the things that are going well in your life. Similarly, self-gratitude entails affirming yourself and what you appreciate about yourself. Recognize the positives; when you focus on them, you amplify their impact and invite better outcomes.

AN EXAMPLE:

Let's suppose that you work in a palliative care environment. If you have poor self-gratitude, then there is a chance you will also be less likely to afford patients' optimal care. Your lack of self-gratitude may lead you to overlook things like your kindness and compassionate disposition and thus you might not share it with those for whom you care.

How can you practice self-gratitude?

The following are some of the actions you can undertake to practice gratitude. Please choose one or more of the following actions to try. Then, reflect on it or them throughout the week.

- ⇒ Get a pen and paper: Write a note acknowledging various people for the positive things they have brought into your life.
- ⇒ Create a list of affirmations based on gratitude, such as: "I am grateful that I can respond to distress in a measured, even way." Regularly say your affirmations in silence or out loud to change your inner dialogue. The affirmation will help prevent self-limiting beliefs.
- ⇒ Practice balancing and being grateful for your routine: Your caregiving routine might involve going to work, taking care of your loved one, and then doing things you enjoy.

Like Alexis, many family and frontline caregivers do not prioritize their needs. The least effective approaches to coping with your feelings are pushing them aside or, on the other end of the spectrum, allowing them to exacerbate an already challenging situation. In fact, the path toward self-care is a personal journey. The goal of the journey is to connect with your inner self by implementing the strategies outlined in this chapter.