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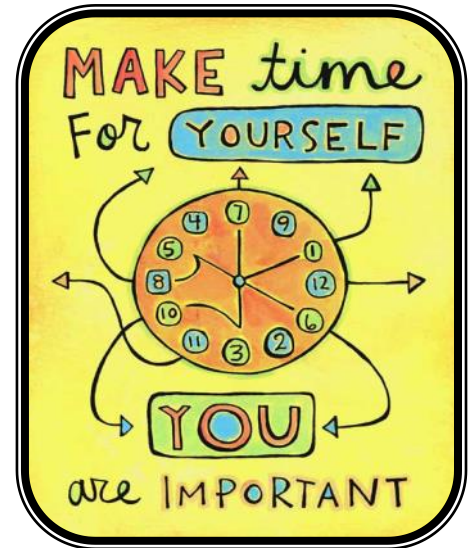
## Self Care: The Path to Effective Caregiving

By Marcy Maler, MMFT, Art Therapy Education & Care Specialist

January characterizes a time for making goals for the New Year. You may be likely to think about dropping those extra pounds, starting a new exercise routine, reading the stack of books you bought for yourself, or taking that often-planned trip with old friends. If you are a caregiver for one with dementia, New Years' goals may not even cross your mind because the stress and duties of providing care can eclipse everything but the essentials. You might feel that life-enhancing goal setting is self-centered. The fact is, **we all have desires for a purposeful new start and we are in need of intentional goals.** Is self-care at the top of your new year goal but at the bottom of your "to do" list?

As primary caregiver, you may find yourself "on duty" 24/7 with limited time off. Though it may feel counter intuitive, being mindful of your own needs may protect you from an emotional breakdown, caregiving burn-out, and physical illness. Taking care of *you* is a very important part of being an *effective* caregiver. It may be time to take action and make provisions for respite care this year.

Frequently, caregivers embark on a task, putting the loved one's needs first, with out asking for help. This can push a caregiver toward exhaustion, further underscoring the importance of self-care. Caring for those with dementia is not a simple walk in the park but rather a long journey with many peaks and valleys. If you were to place an ad with an accurate job description for a caregiver, it may look something like this:



### Help Wanted

*Looking for a person to work long and unpredictable hours in the home, including the middle of the night.*

*Patience, endurance, and ability to manage challenging behavior essential. Sense of humor preferred, but not required.*

*Vacations and days off to be negotiated, but not assured. No experience with dementia necessary; will train on the job.*

It is best if self-care is not discovered the hard way, or before it is too late. Caring for one with dementia is overwhelming and exhausting and the caregiver must pay extra attention to maintaining his or her own healthy lifestyle. One option to ensure self-care is to seek professional help or use supportive resources to help care for your loved one. Wanting to remain in control and be independent makes caregivers struggle with this concept—a dilemma the afflicted person also faces. This false belief that asking for help reflects weakness may cloud a caregiver's vision and get in the way of providing quality care to a loved one.

**Tips & Tools**



**Helpful Resources**

**Friendship Center**

Santa Barbara day programs for adults affected with dementia and other disabilities. Serving continental breakfast, healthy hot lunch and snacks. Additional Brain Fitness programs available with registration. 8:00am to 5:00pm M-F (805)969-0859

**Friendship House**

Solvang Life Enrichment Day Program provides social, personal hygiene management and health monitoring services to elderly who need supervised safe care outside their home. 7:00 am to 7:00 pm M-F 9:00 am to 5:00 pm Sat (805) 688-8748

**Lompoc Valley Haven**

Social day program for 55+ designed to provide affordable respite care in asocial settings. Pay by the hour, no long term commitment. 7:30 am to 3:30 pm M-F (805) 698 9690

**Santa Maria Wisdom Center**

Transportation to and from the Center, on-site nursing care and medication management, physical and occupational therapy and rehabilitation. Services include social and recreational activities, breakfast and a hot lunch. \*Aim to prevent, delay, and reduce premature placement allowing participants to age in place as long as possible. 9:00am to 2:00pm M-F (805) 349-9810

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Contrary to the supposition that asking for assistance is a sign of weakness, receiving help strengthens the caregiver and enables him to continue providing objective and compassionate care.

Attending a support group, an educational program or training, obtaining in-home professional care, and sharing responsibilities

among family members are all forms of help. The opportunity to be at home alone for a bit, while knowing that your loved one is safe, is possibly the most beneficial form of respite. Adult day centers can provide the caregiver this opportunity.

*Choosing an adult day centers may be a great idea, but why does it feel so bad?*

Sometimes a caregiver will have a difficult time distinguishing between personality traits and dementia behaviors, thinking that her loved one is not a social person. People, however, are social by nature and they desire human contact. Engaging with others meets a person's emotional needs and stimulates the brain. Dementia compromises a person's ability to want to try something new, initiate a task, or follow through. As much as a caregiver believes her loved one enjoys her company, being around the same person all the time may get old. If your loved one is alone during the day, reading books he can no longer follow, or tracking you around the house he would benefit from the stimulation of an adult day center.

If your loved one is in the very early stage of dementia she may not be ready for this type of care. However, if you are concerned about leaving your loved one

alone then it is appropriate to begin a day care. Do not wait until your loved one is too disoriented to join a center—that may be too late for her to benefit from the

Frequently, caregivers embark into a job without ever asking for help all the while putting the needs of others first. This repeatedly pushes a caregiver past safe limits.

activities and social interaction that may include challenging games, support group discussions, music and light exercise. Centers are utilized by people who can carry on conversations to some extent and are able to

participate in the activities.

It is likely your loved one will initially protest going to an adult day center. This resistance may be similar to his not wanting to stop driving, or take his medications. Dementia affects judgment, and your loved one is not able to share the reality that you see. It is you, the caregiver, that must recognize how to satisfy the need for activities and take control to make the best decision for the person with dementia. *Making* that decision is the first step.

Cost is a concern for many families, but having a break from the role of caregiver is an important expense to work into the budget. Hiring a professional caregiver can be expensive, whereas using an adult day center ca much more affordable option for the amount of respite it will provide. Ask about center rates and inquire about sliding scale fees, respite grants, and veteran benefits.

You have done everything right as caregiver as evidenced by the contentment of your loved one. It is undeniable that you need some time off to revitalize your needs and provide your loved one with time to socialize and be stimulated. An adult day center is a great option that will benefit both of you.