

For families, partners & carers: looking after yourself

As caring people, we naturally don't want the people we care about to make mistakes. We may feel a need to protect them from the stress and suffering that their actions can cause. Sometimes in doing this we may not always look after ourselves properly.

When a person is in a crisis, there may be a need to be 'on duty' and provide 24-hour support. While this can be necessary, once the crisis is over and things have settled down it is also important to take a step back from the situation and not be constantly available. This is a time for you to look after yourself and attend to your own social, emotional, physical and mental health needs. Even though you may feel guilty about this, it is important to remember that caring for yourself also shows the person you care about how they can look after themselves better too. To help you maintain a balance between your own day-to-day demands and to assist you in your caring role, there are a number of things you can do.

AIM FOR BALANCE IN YOUR LIFE

- Spend time with other family members and friends
- Maintain hobbies and interests in your life that you find enjoyable, satisfying or interesting
- Maintain your spirituality, in whatever way that means to you, which may include spending time in nature, informal prayer, or other activities that nourish you
- Eat healthy and nutritious food
- Drink plenty of water, at least 2 litres per day
- Engage in regular exercise
- Ensure you get plenty of sleep (between 6 and 9 hours each night)

ATTEND TO YOUR OWN EMOTIONS

A person's problems can affect many members within a family (e.g. parents, spouse, children or siblings).

This can bring up a whole range of emotions such as guilt (Where did I go wrong? Did I do anything to cause this?), shame and stigma (What will other people think? Who can I talk to?), fears of what will happen to the person in the future, frustration and anger at oneself or the person you care about, hurt and grief (for being misunderstood or at the losses within your own or the other person's life). You are not alone in these feelings and it can often be useful to acknowledge them in a number of ways:

- Talk to a friend or other family member who is not overly involved in the situation
- Write about or journal your feelings; this can provide much needed relief
- There are many websites that offer blogging where you can talk to other people going through similar problems
- Join a support group that meets on a regular basis
- Seek support for yourself by contacting a health professional; talking to your doctor in the first instance can be helpful
- Find out all that you can about personality disorders and treatment options. Ask a health professional for reliable sources of information
- Have an action plan to put in place in times of crisis. Wherever possible, involve the person you care about in the planning of this
- Talk to staff involved in the person's treatment, while they may not be able to provide all of the information you would like to know due to confidentiality, they can provide you with a basic level of information and direct you to resources that will assist you in your supportive role
- Be aware of emergency services offered by your local mental health service, including ambulance and the role of police
- Have emergency and crisis phone numbers and information on hand for easy access when needed.

The Project Air Strategy acknowledges the major support of NSW Health. The Project works with mental health clinicians, consumers and carers to deliver effective treatments, implements research strategies supporting scientific discoveries, and offers high quality training and education. Contact us at info-projectair@uow.edu.au or visit www.projectairstrategy.org