

Circles of Caregiving Pressure

You matter too.

Caring for another person can involve love, loyalty and meaning, while also bringing practical, emotional and physical pressure. This resource helps separate what belongs to you, what you may be able to influence, and what remains outside your control. The aim is not to care less. It is to stop carrying every part of the situation as though it is yours to solve.

The three circles

CIRCLE OF CONTROL	Your own basic needs, one boundary today, your response, your self-talk and the choices available to you in this moment.
CIRCLE OF INFLUENCE	Sharing responsibilities, asking for practical help, planning respite, communicating needs, gathering information and building a support network.
CIRCLE OF CONCERNS	Another person's condition, service waiting times, family opinions, unexpected changes, other people's decisions and the wider impact on work or family life.

Why caregiving pressure can become overwhelming

Caregiving often combines responsibility with uncertainty. You may be watching for changes, coordinating appointments, remembering medication or routines, managing work and family, advocating with services, and absorbing other people's emotions. Even when individual tasks look small, the cumulative load can be substantial.

A key distinction

Responsibility is not the same as total control. You can care deeply, act responsibly and advocate strongly without being able to determine another person's health, the speed of services, how relatives respond or what tomorrow brings.

Reducing caregiving pressure in everyday life

Protect the basics first

Food, drink, medication, sleep, movement, quiet and medical appointments for yourself are not optional extras. When caregiving is intense, basic needs are often the first things pushed aside. A minimum-care plan can help: decide what must happen even on the hardest days.

Share the invisible work

Caregiving includes tasks other people may not see: anticipating problems, remembering information, researching, making calls, monitoring mood or symptoms and planning around uncertainty. Write these tasks down. This makes the load visible and creates opportunities to delegate specific jobs rather than simply asking someone to 'help more'.

Ask for practical help clearly

Specific requests are easier to respond to: 'Could you collect the prescription on Thursday?', 'Can you stay for one hour while I go out?', or 'Please make this phone call and tell me the outcome.' A request does not guarantee the answer, but it moves the task into the circle of influence.

Use boundaries without abandoning care

A boundary might involve when you are available, which tasks you can realistically do, what behaviour you will step away from, or when another service or family member needs to take responsibility. Boundaries can protect the relationship as well as the caregiver.

Plan respite before crisis

Recovery is easier to protect when it is planned rather than waiting until you are completely depleted. Respite may be formal care, another trusted person taking over, protected quiet time, a walk, therapy, a regular activity or simply a period when you are not the person making decisions.

Family, partners and supporters

Useful support includes listening without immediately giving advice, taking ownership of agreed tasks, respecting the caregiver's need for time away, checking what would genuinely help, and avoiding comments that imply they should simply cope better. Caregivers may need permission to talk about difficult feelings without those feelings being interpreted as a lack of love.

Workplace considerations

Where appropriate, carers may benefit from discussing flexibility, predictable communication, emergency contact arrangements, temporary workload adjustments or leave options with an employer. Needs vary, so practical conversations should focus on what would make work sustainable rather than requiring disclosure beyond what feels necessary.

My caregiving pressure map

Use this worksheet to separate the pressure into manageable parts. You can complete only the sections that feel useful today.

1. What am I carrying or worrying about right now?

2. What is genuinely within my control today?

3. What could I influence by asking, communicating, planning or sharing responsibility?

4. What is outside my control, even though it matters deeply to me?

5. Which basic need of my own has been pushed aside?

6. What is one boundary I need today?

7. What practical task could somebody else take ownership of?

8. What would meaningful respite or recovery look like this week?

A message from Maggie

When you care for somebody, it can become very easy for your own needs to disappear underneath appointments, worry, responsibility and the constant question of what might happen next. Caring about someone does not mean you have to carry every part of their situation alone. You are allowed to need rest. You are allowed to ask for help. You are allowed to have limits and difficult feelings. Looking after yourself is not stepping away from the person you care about; it is part of making care more sustainable.

Books and further reading

- **The Selfish Pig's Guide to Caring** — Hugh Marriott. A candid UK-focused book about the emotional realities of caring.
- **Already Toast** — Kate Washington. Explores the hidden labour and personal impact of family caregiving.
- **Set Boundaries, Find Peace** — Nedra Glover Tawwab. Practical support for identifying and communicating boundaries.
- **Burnout** — Emily Nagoski & Amelia Nagoski. Useful context on stress, recovery and completing the stress cycle.

UK information and support

Carers UK provides information about carers' rights, assessments, work, finances and practical support.

NHS information for carers covers carer assessments and routes to local support. Local authorities can also provide information about carers' assessments and respite options.

Sources and further information:

Carers UK — www.carersuk.org

NHS: Support and benefits for carers — www.nhs.uk/conditions/social-care-and-support-guide/support-and-benefits-for-carers/

GOV.UK: Carer's Assessment — www.gov.uk/apply-needs-assessment-social-services

If caring responsibilities are affecting your physical or mental health, consider speaking with your GP or another appropriate professional. If you or the person you support is in immediate danger, use emergency services.

SPACE TO BREATHE THERAPY

Control: act • Influence: communicate • Concerns: release