
Emotional support services for carers

Summary

- The physical and emotional demands of caring for someone can be high.
- Counselling and networking can help you understand and work through challenges you face as part of your care role.
- Trying to stay healthy and well can help you in the care role.
- Emotions like anger, frustration, guilt, exhaustion and annoyance are all normal. Sharing these feelings with a counsellor or with other carers can help.
- If you need extra carer support, speak with your local doctor or contact Carers Victoria, which offers free short-term counselling for carers.

The physical and emotional demands of caring for someone who has a mental illness, disability, is recovering from an accident or illness, or is an older person with care needs can be high.

As a carer, looking after your own emotional needs is important so you can keep doing your care role, stay healthy, and enjoy life as much as possible.

The emotional challenges of being a carer

Caring can be rewarding, but it can also be stressful and demanding. Many carers experience complicated feelings related to their role as a carer. Emotions like anger, frustration, guilt, exhaustion and annoyance are all normal.

When you spend most of your spare time looking after someone else, it is easy to become isolated or lonely. You might be too busy to catch up with friends, or they may not feel comfortable visiting you when you are looking after someone else.

Friends, family and other carers can offer support, you may also find it helpful to speak with a counsellor – someone without an emotional connection to you or the person you care for.

The role of counselling

Counselling can help you understand and work through challenges you face as part of your care role. It can also help you manage the behaviours and relationships that are a part of caring for someone.

Dealing with any negative feelings you may have in a positive way can help you stay in your care role longer.

Counselling, networking and carer support services can:

- provide emotional and psychological support
- help with any relationship issues you might be experiencing with the person you care for, or with others
- offer advice for managing challenging situations or behaviour
- offer grief counselling if needed
- help with advice about protecting your rights as a carer.

You can have counselling by yourself or include a partner or other family members.

Counselling can help you:

- work out your own needs
- help make sure you are looking after your physical health and wellbeing

- build resilience and learn ways to manage your feelings
- manage feelings of loss and other overwhelming or confusing feelings
- deal with stress and conflict and other factors that make caring more difficult
- provide practical advice for problem solving.

Finding counselling services

Many healthcare professionals can provide some level of counselling support. Start by speaking with your local doctor. Your doctor may then refer you to a specialised counselling service, if needed.

Alternatively, Carers Victoria offers free short-term counselling (up to six sessions) for carers. The service is available to people who provide any type of care and carer support to a family member or friend. Carers Victoria can also provide support if you have recently stopped providing care (for example, if the person you care for has moved into residential care or has died).

This service is available in locations across metropolitan Melbourne and rural regions of Victoria and, in some areas, counsellors who speak languages other than English are available. You can conduct your counselling sessions face to face, over the phone or via Skype.

Contact the Carer Advisory Line on 1800 242 636 or ask your local doctor to make a referral for you.

Other types of emotional support

Getting emotional support doesn't always mean formal counselling - there are many ways you can get emotional support and look after yourself. These include:

- catching up with other carers in your local area
- spending time with your family and friends
- taking time out for yourself for things like hobbies and exercise
- organising respite services for the person you care for
- going on a holiday.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Counsellor
- Carers Victoria, call (03) 9396 9500
- Carer Advisory Line, call 1800 242 636

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