



Balance in the Eye of the Storm: Self-Care when Caring for a Loved One with Mental Health Concerns

Storms are common when caring for someone with mental health issues. There can be regular disruptions. You may be uncertain what each day will be like. This can challenge your ability to stay steady and balanced. It is important to develop tools to help you cope. Then you can deal with the emotional upset around you.

Identify the triggers, signs, and symptoms of losing YOUR balance:

- **What was the triggering event?** Can you identify the event, thought or experience that told you you were off balance? Try to step back and become a curious observer. Like a detective, examine what just happened from all points of view.
- **What were the signs?** Signs are the things that can be seen with the eye, like clenched fists and trembling hands.
- **What were the symptoms?** Symptoms are your internal reactions. They are your thoughts, feelings, reactions and behaviors.

Identify the warning signs that you are off balance:

- What feelings alert you to being out of balance?
- What thoughts alert you that you are out of balance?
- What physical reactions make you aware of being out of balance?
- What behaviors alert you to being out of balance?

Returning to balance:

- **Acceptance** - It may be painful to sit with your feelings. You may avoid the signs that things are out of balance. You may try to deny some of your behaviors and physical reactions. In order to get relief, you need to accept your feelings. Once you stop resisting, you can use this self-knowledge to develop your action plan.



- **Build knowledge** – Learn more about the illness and your own reactions to it. This can have a huge impact on your ability to manage yourself and the illness. Then you can develop new strategies for coping.
- **Develop an action plan** - This is a plan to help you move out of the storm. It is not a plan to change your loved one. Let your loved one know honestly how you are feeling and what your limits are. You can explain what you are hoping for. But beyond that, you are the only one who can make changes or live with your choices.
- **Brainstorm ideas** - Sometimes when you are upset you don't see any options. That can make the upset seem even worse. Let yourself brainstorm without cutting out ideas before you let them blossom. This may allow you to find many options that may provide some help.
- **Make connections** – Be open to finding all available support, to help you care for yourself. This will enable you to better care for your loved one.
- **Identify current supports** - Examples may include:
 - Caregiver Support Coordinator
 - Caregiver Support Line
 - VA Medical and Mental Health Providers
 - Family
 - Friends
 - Neighbors
 - Church/Faith Community
 - National Alliance Mental Illness (NAMI)
 - Alcoholics Anonymous
 - Narcotics Anonymous
 - Alzheimer's Association
 - Community Agencies (local 211 help line)