



## **Beyond the Blues: Coping with Caregiver Depression Handout**

Are you a caregiver that is carrying the heavy weight of depression? Caregivers are at least two times more apt to suffer from depression than others. Depression is an illness not a reflection of your strength as a person. Depression is not a sign of being weak. You wouldn't think you were weak because you had any other medical illness. Depression that isn't treated harms your thoughts, feelings and physical health. Depression is not a problem to ignore.

### **What are the symptoms of Depressive Illness?**

Feeling sad is a normal part of life. How do you determine when you have crossed into a clinical depression? Feeling sad, moody, or frustrated for short periods of time is a normal part of life. Depression is an illness with certain symptoms. The symptoms must occur for **at least a two-week period** of time.

#### **You would have at least one of these two symptoms for at least 2 weeks:**

- Depressed mood most of the day nearly every day
- Loss of interest or joy in almost all activities

**-And-**

#### **Four or more of the following symptoms also present for at least 2 weeks:**

- Eating more or less than normal with weight loss or weight gain
- Poor sleep such as being unable to fall asleep, stay asleep, or sleeping too much
- Feeling agitated or slowed down
- Fatigue or loss of energy
- Negative thoughts of being worthless, highly guilty, or worried thoughts
- Hard time thinking, making choices, or poor memory
- Reoccurring thoughts of death, or suicidal thoughts or planning

### **What causes Depressive Illness?**

- Change in brain chemicals
- Runs in family backgrounds
- Facing a trauma, loss of a loved one, or other stressful situations



- The ways in which you tend to cope with life events emotionally and mentally
- Some health issues and medicines

### **What can you do to treat Depressive Illness?**

Depressive illness will make it very hard to do the very things you need to do in order to get well. You will need to balance being gentle with what you expect of yourself. In order to get well you will also need to push yourself to do things even when you don't feel like it.

- Pay closer attention to your thoughts and feelings
- Speak up, set limits, and take care of your needs
- Cut back on unneeded stresses
- Set up small rituals or daily practices to take a few moments to reflect on yourself
- Take a break from the demands and do something you enjoy
- Treat yourself with kindness and compassion
- Talk with your Doctor and see if medicine might be an option
- Reach out for support and connect with others
- Seek out a counselor
- Make sure that you are eating regular meals with healthy foods
- Follow the guidance for good sleep hygiene
- Daily movement or exercise
- Get outside and soak in some sunlight
- Having a daily structure or plan and break down tasks to manageable steps
- Be aware of your negative thoughts; It's your depression talking
- Reach out for help with any thoughts of suicide
- Treat yourself with some kindness as you would with any other sickness
- Practice being mindful

**Reach out to the VA Caregiver Support Line. Our Licensed Social Workers can assist you in finding a path forward "Beyond the Blues!"**