

A Bad Day: Recount of Caregivers' Stories

One of the recent themes in my counselling work with caregivers is 'what is a bad day like?'

This is a very essential step as caregivers relieve their stress and recount worst moments that have affected them quite significantly as they care for their loved ones daily. It is also a time when caregivers and counsellors give themselves permission to visit some difficult realities of caregiving.



'I know she has dementia but I am so tired, I can't find myself loving towards her.'

'I hit his hand, I never wanted to do that and I hate myself for doing that.'

'Nothing turns out well today and he has to dirty his pants just before bedtime.'

'I never had to manage these (responsibilities) in the past, to others it might be simple but to me, it is not.'

Caregivers often share how they hold themselves or their loved ones responsible on those bad days and the afterthoughts continue to linger through the day. Despite how well they had been in their careers and in the eyes of their friends, many cannot help but to doubt themselves on their kindness, filial piety and patience. Their confidence then becomes shaky. Sometimes, you see them losing the "glow" (as how some of my healthcare colleagues describe).

In counselling, we hope caregivers can embrace "taking responsibility with kindness" instead of "judging ourselves with heavy expectations". A good question to ask caregivers – "the way you are blaming yourself – is it making you feel better or worse over time?"



What alleviates and is helpful then? (If you may take away these actual statements from caregivers I work with.)

I am still an okay person, I may have been too tired/ depleted and forgot about myself (my needs)....

When I start to hate and have worrying views about others, I tell myself that this is not me and it must have come from some feelings that are overwhelming e.g. tiredness, hurt and helplessness.

I try to turn to something or someone which/who can help me feel kind and see my goodness.

When I have more bad days, I try not to take it upon myself. I try to connect with other help to stabilise e.g. get helpful knowledge about my loved one's medical condition, consider day care and home services and strengthening and adjusting myself through counselling.

I come to realise that I am ageing too and my younger days' way of taking charge of everything can't be exerted upon my body now. I need to maintain my basic (health and nutrition)...

I allow myself to go to the relaxation corner in the house... with the feelings and hug myself... till the intensity takes its time to pass...



To the many caregivers who are experiencing a bad day right now, do try to allow and be curious about the different feelings and thoughts for a while. I wish you kindness in dealing with those difficult moments and may you be able to dedicate care to yourself (in whichever way that is beneficial).

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