

The Spiritual Needs of Caregivers



Hadley Kifner, MDiv, BCC
Pediatric Chaplain, UNC Health Care

Introductory Statements



- I am me. Who are you?
- Disclaimers:
 - I am biased toward each and every one of you being as spiritually whole and well as you can possibly be.
 - I am nervous.

Goals



- Define *spirituality* and *caregiver*
- Discuss how to nurture the spirit and why it matters
- Discover some spiritual practices
- Develop a solid understanding of empathy
- Discuss the relationship between boundaries and balance
- Questions + Conversation (not lecture)

Working Definition of Spirituality



*“Spirituality is the aspect of humanity that refers to the way individuals **seek and express meaning and purpose**, and to the way they **experience their connectedness to the moment, to self, to others, and to the significant or sacred.**”*

D. Bolton, et al, 2006

So...are you a spiritual being?



Y-o-u are a spiritual being.

You have gifts that are unique and individual to you and the world needs you – the world needs you to share yourself and your gifts.

You, in turn, need to receive and experience others and their gifts to you.

Working Definition of Caregiver



Caregiver care·giv·er (kâr'gĭv'ər)

n. a person who has accepted responsibility for looking after a vulnerable neighbor or relative *Also called* **carer**

and / or

n. An individual, such as a physician, nurse, or social worker, who assists in the identification, prevention, or treatment of an illness or disability. An individual, such as a parent, foster parent, or head of a household, who attends to the needs of a child or dependent adult.

Word Origin and History

n. by 1974, from **care** (n.) + **giver**. It has, in many senses, the same meaning as **care-taker**, which ought to be its antonym.

But what is the difference?



“Caring is the carriage that brings love to the doorstep of need.” - John Mogabgab

“Caretaking is the act of assuming responsibility for a person, place, or thing with the ultimate aim of protecting, improving, or fixing.” -

www.dictionary.com

Caregiving is a give and take between two people, each with different sets of needs. It is “emotional labor”. - Elizabeth Green

Thoughts?

Kinds of Caregivers



- By choice, obligation, circumstance
- For a family member or as a professional
- Clinically trained or experientially trained
- To someone who is recovering, disabled long-term, facing terminal illness, at end-of-life
- With respite and helpful resources available, desperate with no refuge or relief in site

Bringing it all together, here's the rub:



*“**Caregiving** has to spring from a deep authentic **spiritual** place within us - otherwise we care because of our neurotic need to be needed, a desire to be important to someone, or the longing to win approval.”* - Elizabeth Green

*“To become mature in any form of **caring** requires **spiritual** practice.”* - Keith Beaseley-Topliffe

Why is it important to pay attention to our spiritual needs?



"We have an obligation to our clients, as well as ourselves, our colleagues and our loved ones, not to be damaged by the work we do."

"...We are stewards not just of those who allow us into their lives but of our own capacity to be helpful."

- Trauma Stewardship

Common Spiritual Reactions



- Search for meaning and purpose
- Sense of restlessness, disappointment, or increased cynicism
- Questions about God or the Divine
- Struggling to understand the purpose of suffering
- Preoccupied with potential of own illness, pain, or death
- Disappointment in belief system or Higher Power
- Inability to pray, feel hopeful, or trust Divine
- Feeling martyr-like
- Anger, doubt, or indifference toward higher power
- Enlightenment, awakening, deepened understanding
- Sense of awe, wonder, and purpose
- Increased peace and wisdom
- Other?

Nurturing Your Spirit as a Caregiver



1. **Identify spiritual practices** that allow you to recognize the associated stress and then release it, thereby sustaining you in your work.
2. **Develop intentional approaches** to caregiving that revolve around a solid understanding of empathy.
3. Be mindful of the actual needs of the person to whom you are giving care, as well as your own, so that you can **set good boundaries and achieve balance.**

1. Identify Spiritual Practices that Sustain You



- Mindfulness / Meditation
- Prayer
- Creative Expression
- Silence
- Nature
- Body Movement (Run, dance, tennis)
- Body + Mind + Spirit (yoga)
- Develop a mantra (*Bloom where planted / I have a body, mind, and soul / Breathe peace*)
- Salt Water (tears, sweat, sea)
- Others?

Spiritual Practice Activity (5 minutes)



Meditation

“Strong Back, Soft Front” by Roshi Joan Halifax

2. Develop a Solid Understanding of Empathy



Empathy is listening or caring in a way that results in feeling understood and accepted.

Empathy is the opposite of shame.

Empathy generates connection.
This is different from sympathy which creates disconnection.

Everyone desires and is worthy of empathy.

Barriers to Empathy



- “Stacking the deck”
“You think you had a bad day, let me tell you about mine...”
- Failing to dig deep.
“I cannot relate to this particular situation at all and so have nothing to offer VS I cannot relate to this particular situation but if I go into my own life story, I can recall a time when I felt alone/afraid/vulnerable...”
- Playing the role of martyr
“No one should offer me empathy. I chose this field / am stuck in this role and have to make the most of it. The best way to do that is push down the pain and hurt and keep working hard. (Secret: I am a saint and if I can do this hard work without leaning on anyone, I am really something special.)”

Empathy → Self-compassion → Empathy



We cannot give to others what we do not have to give to ourselves.

Empathy Activity #1 (5 minutes x 2)



Authentic Sharing and Listening

Find a partner.

Decide which person will share first and which will listen first.

Share / listen to the hardest thing about a recent caregiving experience.

Switch partners.

Empathy Activity #2 (5 minutes)



Self-Assessment of Empathy Toward Self Quiz

- 1: Almost Never
- 2: Occasionally
- 3: About Half of the Time
- 4: Fairly Often
- 5: Almost Always

3. Set Good Boundaries + Achieve Balance



“The expectation that we can be immersed in illness, suffering, and loss daily and not be touched by it is as unrealistic as expecting to be able to walk through water without getting wet.” - Rachel Naomi Remen

Caregivers are at risk to get off-balance or feel imbalanced and then, without clarity, may inadvertently cross boundaries.

Boundaries (Black and Enns, 1997)



Healthy Boundaries Foster

- Self-esteem and self-respect
- Mutually sharing and trusting relationships
- Protection from physical, emotional, and spiritual intrusion
- Equal partnerships where responsibility and power are shared (as fully as possible)
- Separation and clarity among needs, thoughts, feelings, and desires
- Empowerment and strong sense of identity and purpose

Unhealthy Boundaries Foster

- Self-denial or self-blame
- Too much intimacy or too much distance
- Potential for rejection, abandonment, dishonesty, or manipulation
- Imbalanced relationship with power dynamics where reciprocity is not present
- Conflation and confusion of needs, thoughts, feelings, and desires
- Disempowerment and decreased sense of identity and purpose

Why Caregivers Need Boundaries



“A boundary is any limit I need to honor so I can love or work with others without resentment and with integrity.” – David Gruder

Boundary Activity #1 (5 minutes x 2)



Find a partner.

Decide which person will share first and which will listen first.

Share / listen to a time when you crossed a boundary. Why did you do it? What happened? What did you learn?

Switch partners.

Boundary Activity #2 (5 minutes)



Self-Quiz

Black and Enns Better Boundary Assessment

- A: Definitely True**
- B: Mostly True**
- C: Somewhat True**
- D: Not Very True**
- E: Hardly True, If At All**

Things to Remember



- It takes practice to set good boundaries
- Exceptions can be made when you have discerned that a boundary can be crossed with integrity.
- Boundaries can be redefined and/or re-established at any time
- Three things inform how you set your boundaries
 - ✦ Intuition (your gut)
 - ✦ Conscience (your morality)
 - ✦ Emotions (your feelings)

When you are at a threshold...



... Remember **G . R . A . C . E .**

- **Gather your attention:** pause and breathe
- **Recall intention:** what matters?
- **Attune to self/other:** what is happening?
- **Consider:** what will really help here?
- **Engage:** remind yourself and the other of relationship

Joan Halifax

Purpose of Boundaries



- To **protect** your best self
- To **preserve** your best self
- To **present** your best self

Good boundaries help us maintain an emotional bond of love, concern, and caring without the negative results of desperation, rescuing, enabling, fixing, or controlling.

Boundaries lead to Balance → → Healthier Caregiving

Balance Activity (5 minutes)



Meditation

Sharon Salzberg's meditation on Loving-kindness

Going Forth



(together)

May the light of your soul guide you.

*May the light of your soul bless the work you do
with the secret love and warmth of your heart.*

May you see in what you do the beauty of your own soul.

*May the sacredness of your work bring healing, light, and renewal
to those who work with you and to those who receive your work.*

May your work never weary you.

*May it release within you the wellspring of refreshment,
inspiration, and excitement.*

May you be present in what you do.

- "A Blessing" by John O'Donohue

Sources



Caring. Weavings, Sept/Oct 2005, Vol xx, Number 5. (Editor: John Mogabgab).

Resilience in Palliative Care: Achievement in Adversity (Eds: Barbara Monroe and David Oliviere), London: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Martin, William and Nancy. The Caregiver's Tao Te Ching: Compassionate Caring for Your Loved Ones and Yourself. Novato: New World Library, 2011.

Salzburg, Sharon. Real Happiness at Work: Meditations for Accomplishment, Achievement, and Peace (pp 129-130), 2016.

O'Donohue, John. Anam Cara: A Book of Celtic Wisdom, New York: HarperCollins, 1997.

Halifax, Joan on "Grace" <https://www.upaya.org/2014/...>

"A Concept Analysis of Empathy," *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 23 (1996): 1162-1167.

Black, Jan and Enns, Greg Enns. Better Boundaries: Owning and Treasuring Your Life, Oakland: New Harbinger Publications, 1997.

Contact Information



Hadley.Kifner@unchealth.unc.edu

Phone: 984.974.0217

Pager: 919.347.0331

Questions and Discussion

