The Wellness Initiative is a program of the Michigan Alzheimer's Disease Center at the University of Michigan. This initiative supports family caregivers of adults living with memory loss through providing innovative wellness programs emphasizing stress resilience to ensure continued health and well-being on the caregiving journey.

AUGUST 2020

Monthly Wellness Update

"My dear friend, I may be the victim of wrong perceptions, and what I write here may not reflect the truth. However, this is my experience of the situation. This is what I really feel in my heart. If there is anything wrong in what I write, let us sit down and look into it together"

— Thich Nhat Hanh

Anger

Two weeks ago, while sitting in my car and preparing my face and hands for entering a community pharmacy, I watched a man about my own age have a minutes-long tantrum. My first instinct was to look for another person to figure out who he was raging with. There wasn’t another person in sight. The doors to the pharmacy were closed. Just this man and his anger, animating his body like a giant toddler. The mother in me felt compassion toward him. The woman in me felt fear. The citizen in me felt disbelief and anger. Waves of emotion continued to pass through us both as I observed him. I watched my own strong judgement and slow, cooling distance, arrive. He was mask-less and enraged by what I assume was fury over the clear signage about wearing masks indoors. I’ll never know for certain.

What I do know is my own experience and how I felt. While I was witnessing emotion overtake this man, who is likely a capable adult in other circumstances, I recognized myself. I recognized all of us. We each know what it means to lose our serenity and how powerful it is to want to look outwardly to either find blame or reasons. Mostly, we take aim at ourselves.
Caregivers understand the discomfort of anger intimately. In my work as a clinical social worker, I see how many caregivers struggle with anger and their efforts, over many years, to work through difficult feelings, to identify their needs more clearly and prioritize important decisions, such as radical self-care. Grief, when expressed initially through anger, can make it challenging to address. Left unattended, it can become corrosive to wellbeing and the quality of important relationships, including the one we have with ourselves. Meeting what cannot be controlled, such as the symptoms of dementia, becomes an act of heroic shapeshifting to remain calm and respond to what is actually happening and not how we want things to be. This is the expectation caregivers face every day... in normal times. And now, in pandemic times, responding to the unexpected in what may be unreliable, if not also deeply unsettling and disappointing circumstances. So yes! Anger is an absolutely normal, valid and reasonable response to unmet needs by way of thwarted plans, upended lifestyles, disappointment and ongoing inconvenience and exhaustion. Anger, like a caregiver, can be easily misunderstood and often placated when what they really need is attention, the opportunity to express themselves and to feel valued.

So eventually, the man walked back to his car and fumed in silence, his hands pounding against the steering wheel until he started the ignition and drove away. Just observing him was upsetting, leaving my own nervous system agitated and protective. After he left, I took a few more minutes before heading into the store and I wished he had been able to do the same before driving away. I hoped wherever he arrived next, and whomever he interacted with next, was not met by this anger, though it is likely this event traveled with him for some time. It can be a contagion. Anger works like this in our lives unless we consciously, firmly and thoughtfully guide its aim to transform into something useful or at least into something which reduces the potential for damage or abuse. Most of us are on edge and this hypervigilance takes its toll. The root of anger begins with suffering, and we all understand suffering, especially these days. We need only look at the day’s headlines to see its impact and devastation.

Wondering about the truth of our own or another’s anger history and story, such as the man at the pharmacy, illuminates something which has guided my own sanity these past many months. Recognizing how much I don’t know. We don’t know. None of us know. Even so, we are in charge of the narrative and the meaning of things in our own lives. We don’t need to know how things will work out to decide a less harmful response to disappointment, to protect our own hearts and minds in ways which do not callous or create more separateness. We can also be compassionate and still decide to walk away, enforce a boundary or lean in for greater understanding (when we feel safe). We get to decide. And this is as close to control as we can get. Most days, it’s all we control. It builds trust in our capacity to at least meet what arises with kindness. Without exaggeration, being committed to acknowledging and experiencing anger, the importance of feeling and expressing anger in skillful ways saves lives, beginning with our own.

In gratitude,

—Laura Rice-Oeschger, LMSW

Catching Your Breath

Please register [online](#), or call 734-615-8293 to reserve your place.

**VIRTUAL: Catching Your Breath**

A monthly well-being and mindfulness program for family caregivers of adults living with memory loss. The program varies each month and newcomers are always welcome.

Monday, August 10 at 10:00 - 11:30AM

Registration required by Friday, August 7. We will send you the virtual call details upon registration.
New Research Study Looking for Caregivers

Perceptions of Family Caregivers of Older Adults with Dementia Regarding Behavioral and Psychological Symptoms of Dementia, and the Impact of COVID-19

Exploring the experiences of caregivers of people with dementia regarding challenging symptoms of dementia, how they manage these symptoms in the home, and how their experiences have changed during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study is seeking family caregivers living with older adults with dementia to participate in individual interviews. Contact Melissa Harris at mharrisl@umich.edu or 405-513-1271. This study will meet with participants virtually or by telephone.

More information here

Soothing word of the month

Psithurism
The sound of wind in the trees and rustling leaves

Have a Seat.
Practicing alone, together.
with Laura Rice-Oeschger, LMSW

Thursdays, 12:00 - 12:30PM
Virtually via Zoom

We are happy to announce our new weekly Have a Seat mindfulness meditation program taking place Thursdays at noon. To participate in this program, all you need is a computer to join via the web link or a phone to listen to the guided meditation. More information is available on our website here. Would you like to receive weekly reminders for the program? If so, subscribe below.

Subscribe to receive weekly reminders
Upcoming Programs

"Connecting Through Art: Exploring Art Initiatives for People Living with Memory Loss"

August 27, Noon - 1:00PM
Anne Mondro, MFA, Associate Professor at the U-M Penny W. Stamps School of Art & Design will present.
Registration is required here.

Loving on Empty: Free Conference for Family Caregivers

September 19, 10:00AM - Noon
Hosted by Wayne State University Institute of Gerontology, in partnership with Heart to Heart Hospice. Paula Duren of Universal Dementia Caregivers, Peter Lichtenberg, PhD of Wayne State University Institute of Gerontology, and Breeda Miller, Author will present.
Registration is required here.