Stronger Together: Mental Health, Grief, and Caregiving©

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Living with a chronic condition affects the whole person and the whole family. This handout gathers the key ideas from today's talk so you can come back to them when you need them.

Mental Health

Mood is the weather; mental health is the climate. A hard day is normal. Low or anxious feelings that last two weeks or more and get in the way of daily life deserve attention.

Common signs of depression and anxiety

- Feeling hopeless, numb, or no longer enjoying things
- Worry that is hard to control, or feeling restless and on edge
- Changes in sleep, appetite, or energy
- Trouble concentrating
- Pulling away from people and activities

Thinking traps that affect how we feel

- **Negative self-talk:** "I'm not good enough."
- **All-or-nothing thinking:** "If it isn't perfect, it's a failure."
- **Catastrophizing:** "What if this gets worse and I can't handle it?"
- **Hopeless thinking:** "Things will never get better."

Build a simple action plan: know your triggers, notice your early warning signs, keep a list of what helps (your wellness kit), and decide ahead of time who to call in a crisis.

Grief

Grief is what we feel inside when we lose something or someone that matters. **Mourning** is how we express it outside: talking, crying, rituals, prayer, or being with others. Grief can follow any loss, including lost abilities, plans, or the future we imagined. It comes in waves, not neat stages.

Life grows around grief. Grief doesn't usually shrink over time; instead, our life slowly grows bigger around it.

Help yourself	Help others
Give yourself permission to grieve	Show up and listen more than you speak
Care for your body: sleep, water, food, movement	Say the loss out loud
Find words or rituals that hold meaning	Offer specific help (“I’ll bring dinner Tuesday”)
Lean on people who understand	Skip the fix-it phrases; try “I’m here”
Reach out to a professional if grief blocks daily life	Keep checking in on hard days and anniversaries

Caregiving

The dual identity. Caregivers move between two roles, sometimes within minutes: the loved one (“You are my person first”) and the medical manager (“I must stay vigilant”). That constant shifting is tiring, and it is normal to feel it.

Shame, blame, and guilt often sit on top of love. They are not the truth about who you are; they reflect how much you care.

Resentment is a signal, not a failure. It points to needs for rest, support, and recognition, not a lack of love.

Share the load

1. Map the care: list every recurring task.
2. Ask specifically: “Can you drive us Thursday?” works better than “Let me know if you need anything.”
3. Build in respite and a trained backup.
4. Keep a care binder others can use.
5. Find your people: support groups and families who understand.

From Balance to Harmony©

“Balance feels like trying not to fall. Harmony feels like adjusting the music.” Balance asks, “Is everything equal?” Harmony asks, “Is everything working together?” Your family is an orchestra: not every instrument plays at the same volume all the time.

Reflect on this month

- What feels loudest right now?
- What feels very quiet?
- What would harmony look like this month?

Reframe what you say

- “I’m out of balance” → “We’re in a demanding season.”
- “I should be doing more” → “I am doing what I can in this moment.”
- “I’m always the strong one” → “I’m allowed to need support too.”

Taking Care of You

Taking care of yourself is not stepping away from caregiving. It is what allows you to keep going with compassion.

Affirmations to remember

- I’m doing the best I can.
- What I’m doing would be hard for anyone.
- I’m not perfect, and that’s okay.
- I will get help if it becomes too much.

Small daily practices

- Write down three good things each night.
- Notice micro-joys: a song, sunlight, a laugh.
- Stay connected to people who don’t judge.
- Do one small thing that reminds you who you are beyond caregiving.

Get help if sadness, worry, or grief lasts for weeks and gets in the way of daily life. Talk with a counselor, therapist, psychologist, or your doctor. In a crisis in the U.S., call or text **988**.

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