

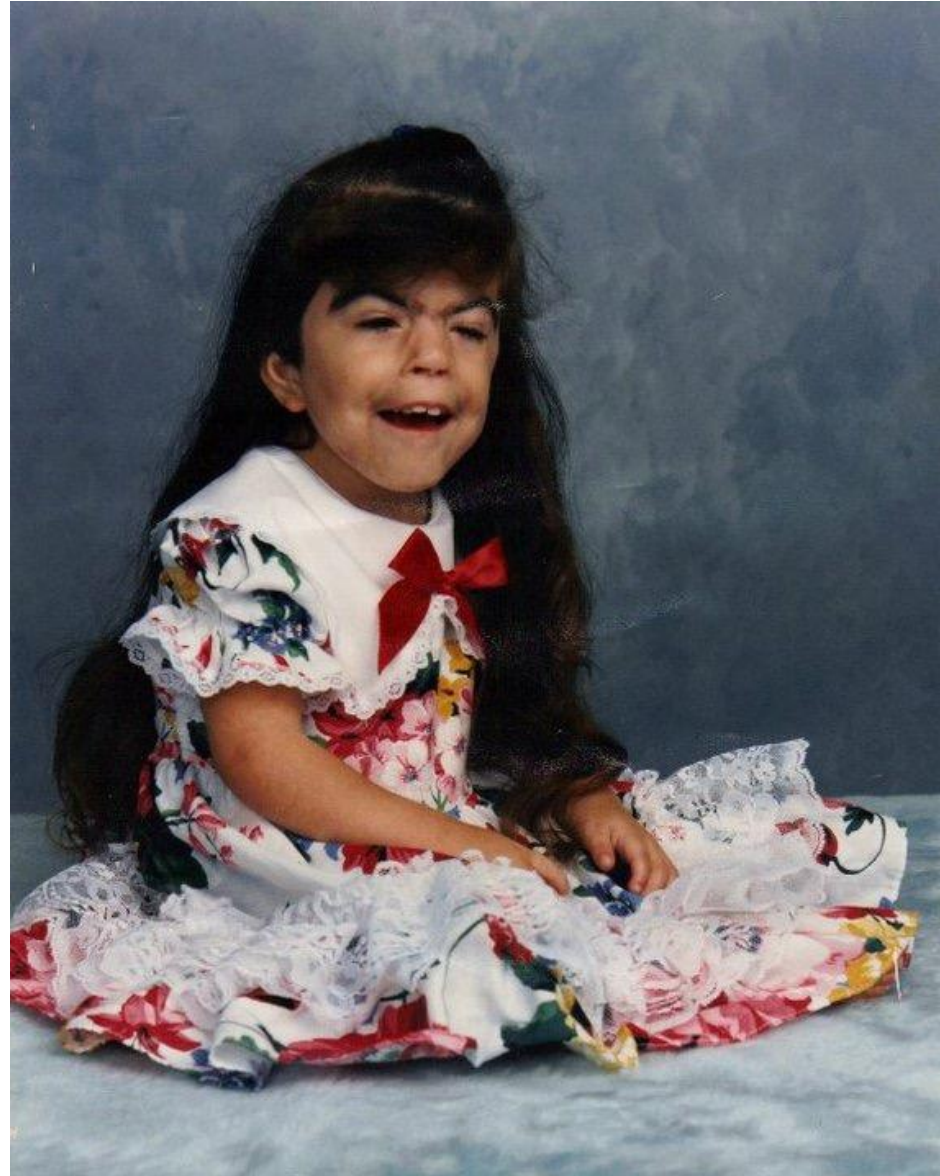
Managing Emotional Exhaustion and Compassion Fatigue with Smart Self-Care

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CdLS Foundation
Cornelia de Lange Syndrome Foundation, Inc.





As the pillars of the family, your needs must also be at the forefront.



What is Emotional Exhaustion?

Physical Symptoms

- Loss of appetite
- Feeling tired all the time
- Lack of peaceful sleep
- Stomach and abdomen related problems
- Heart palpitations
- Headaches

Emotional/Cognitive Symptoms

- Difficulty concentrating
- Everything seems difficult or impossible
- Lack of creativity or imagination
- Work feels dull
- Loss of zeal, hope, motivation
- Cynical thinking
- Feeling tense or on edge
- Feeling detached
- Defeatist attitude

What is Compassion Fatigue?

- The emotional residue or strain of caring for and being exposed to those suffering from the consequences of traumatic events.

- *“Compassion fatigue develops over time – taking weeks, sometimes years to surface. Basically, it’s a low level, chronic clouding of caring and concern for others in your life – whether you work in or outside the home. Over time, your ability to feel and care for others becomes eroded through overuse of your skills of compassion. You also might experience an emotional blunting – whereby you react to situations differently than one would normally expect.”*

~F. Oshberg, MD

Self-Care

Understand self-care as more than a temporary tool to get us through difficult circumstances.

- It is an essential, not an extra.



“Feel Good” Self-Care



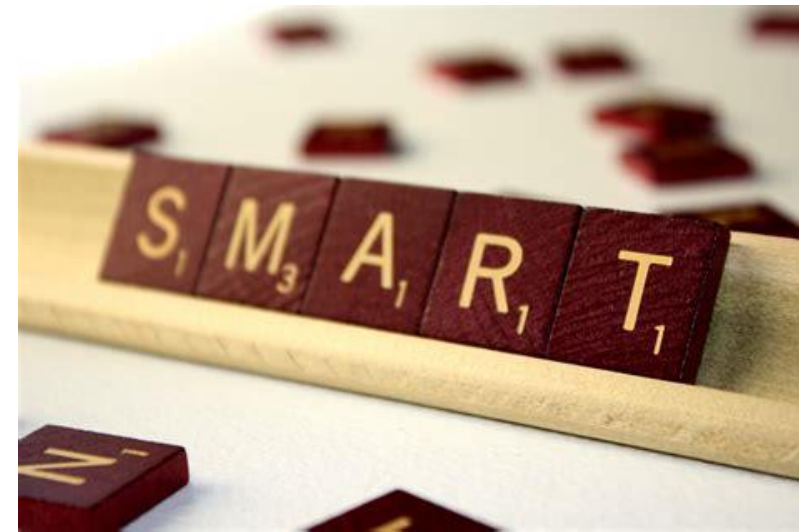
■ Immediate gratification

- Deep breathing
- Eating healthier
- Drinking more water
- Getting massages
- Laughing
- Relaxing
- Snuggling with a puppy
- Participating in hobbies

“Smart” Self-Care

“Self-care requires work, not just relaxation.”

- The first step in smart self-care begins with a conversation with ourselves, asking:
 - What’s working and what’s not working?
 - What is getting in the way?
 - What needs to change?
 - How do I invest my time?



Create a Village

- ❖ Take a critical look at your current support system
- ❖ Find a meaningful group of friends that can support you where you are at now
- ❖ Connect with other parents raising children with special needs
- ❖ Emotional safety
- ❖ Judgment free
- ❖ Stay connected



Confront Emotions

- ❖ Grief
- ❖ Anger
- ❖ Guilt
- ❖ Sadness
- ❖ Fear (of the present and future)
- ❖ Resentment
- ❖ Envy

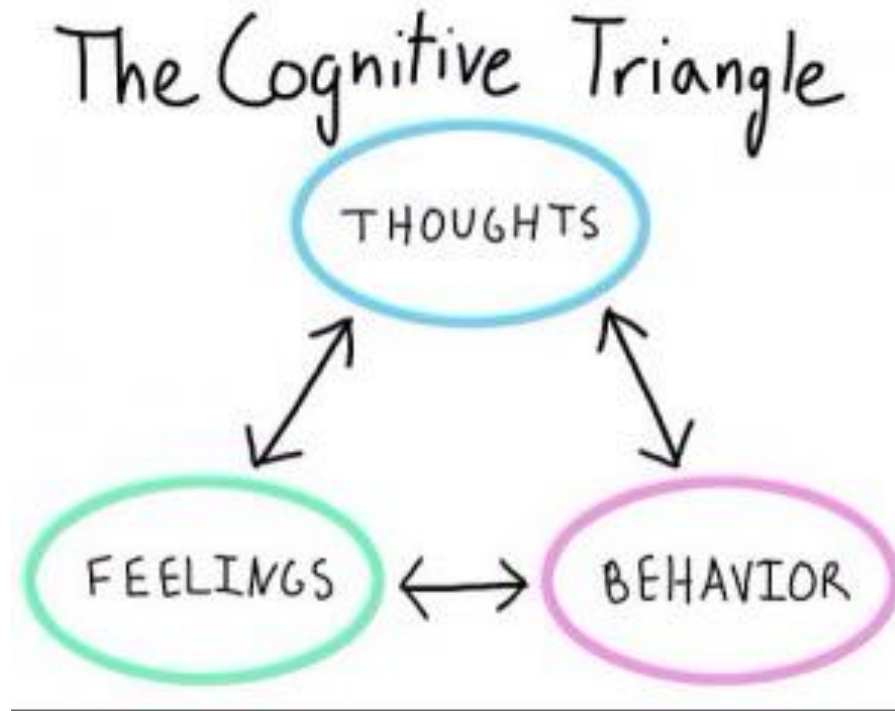


- ❖ **Evaluate your thought processes**
 - ❖ **Thoughts often dictate our emotions**



Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

- CBT teaches us that our thoughts influence our feelings, which then influence our behaviors.



We cannot selectively numb emotions!

Numbing **Vulnerability, Grief, Shame, Guilt, Disappointment** and **Fear**



Means you are also numbing **Joy, Gratitude,** and **Happiness**

- Why and how do we numb?



Boundaries

“A lack of boundaries invites a lack of respect.”





Steps to Setting Boundaries

1. Clearly identify your boundary
2. Understand the need for the boundary
3. Be straightforward
4. Do not apologize or provide lengthy explanations
5. Communicate in a calm and polite way
6. Start with tighter boundaries and loosen as needed
7. Address violations of boundaries early
8. Do not make it personal
9. Utilize your support system
10. Trust your intuition



Boundaries in Marriage

- ❖ Remaining a Team- How are you doing it?
- ❖ Protecting your marriage
- ❖ Nurturing your marriage
- ❖ Being intentional
- ❖ Making Decisions- are they helpful to your marriage?
- ❖ Do you have each other's back?





Boundaries with Family & Friends

- ❖ How do you feel after being around certain people?
- ❖ Have your phrases prepared
- ❖ Use limited self disclosure at times
- ❖ Be aware of the intentions of others

**Make sure
EVERYBODY
in your boat is
rowing, and not
drilling holes
when you're
not looking.
KNOW YOUR
CIRCLE.**

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Handling Unsupportive People

What do you do when people are unsupportive?

- ❖ Educate and raise awareness
- ❖ Provide helpful and scholarly information
- ❖ Maintain your boundaries
- ❖ Know when to ignore
- ❖ Know when to stop
- ❖ Know when to let go



Remove What is Toxic



Ask for Help...Just Do it!

“It takes the strength and courage of a warrior to ask for help.”

- ❖ Reframe your beliefs about asking for help
- ❖ Make the decision to begin asking for help
- ❖ Determine what feels comfortable and doable
- ❖ Go to those safe and dependable
- ❖ Reevaluate your emotions and comfort level after asking for help
- ❖ Take it to the next step



Respite Care

- ❖ Know your available resources
- ❖ Address guilt
- ❖ Identify smaller forms of respite
- ❖ Utilize it...it is there for a reason



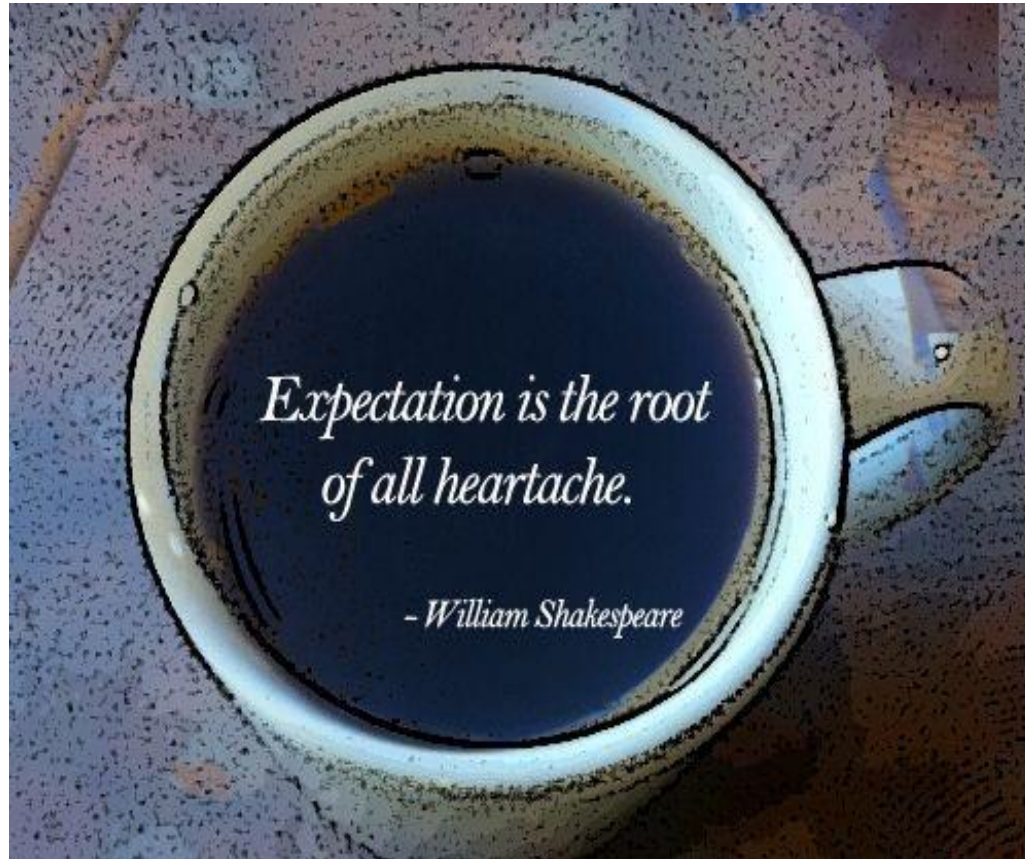


Guilt

- Guilt can be both *justified* (healthy) and *non-purposeful* (unhealthy).
- Unhealthy guilt occurs when we establish unreasonably high standards for ourselves and then feel guilty when we are unable to maintain these standards.
 - ***Identify what it is that you feel guilty about***
 - ***Listen to the messages you give yourself***
 - ***Disrupt the guilty thoughts***
 - ***Reframe thoughts and expectations***
 - ***Acceptance***

Modify Expectations

- ❖ Reevaluate your expectations and know how to modify accordingly



Seek Professional Help

- ❖ **Therapy**

- ❖ Individual
- ❖ Marital
- ❖ Family

- ❖ **Medication**

- ❖ **Support groups**



Learn Self-Compassion

(giving yourself the same kindness and care that you would give to a loved one)

3 Elements of Self-Compassion

Self-Kindness:

Understanding,
not punishment

Sense of Common Humanity:

Everybody
goes through
this

Mindfulness:

Neither
ignoring nor
exaggerating
feelings of
failure

Resources

- <http://self-compassion.org/>
- <https://brenbrown.com/>
- <http://cdlsusa.org/>
- <https://www.caregiver.org/taking-care-you-self-care-family-caregivers>

- Books:
- **It Takes Courage to Be a Caregiver: Answers & Tips for Caregivers of Parents, Special Needs and Others (Courage To Overcome Book 1)** by Cheryl Ginnings (2016).

- **The Self-Care Revolution: Smart Habits & Simple Practices to Allow You to Flourish** by Suzy Reading (2017)

- **Boundaries** by Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend (2017)



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