

"Caring for the caregiver"

A group for those dealing with the chronic stress of caring for a medically complex child

Overview:

1. Introductions and Ice Breaker
2. Group Rules
3. Introduce Tree of Life concept
4. Define the group's purpose and expectations
 - a. Revisit rules
5. Building Community: Why Caring for the caregiver, Introduction to Resiliency
6. Developing you capacity to be Resilient: Self Care ideas*, and developing a self-care plan*
7. Brief overview of trauma: Definition
8. Conversations about stress: Discussion forum
9. Closing:
 - a. Summary of topics covered today
 - b. Questions
 - c. Revisit expectations
 - d. House Keeping: Food preferences
10. Thank-you and close

Introductions

- Facilitators and Parent Navigators
- Member introductions
- Ice-Breaker
 - Interview the person beside you
 - Name, # of children, something someone meeting you for the first time would be surprised to learn about you.

Group rules

- Participant led
- Confidentiality
- If additional support is needed
- Possibility of strong emotions:
 - If members need a break feel free to leave the session, give us a wave to let us know you would like someone to follow you out, if not we will check on you regardless.
- Mandela's:
 - Circles/spheres can have calming effects
 - Can be used for variety of reasons (spiritual, emotional, reduce stress etc..)
 - Symbolic metaphor, contains images that represent a variety of human experiences and feelings
 - At any time group members can colour their mendela

Housekeeping

- Facility Info:
 - Bathrooms: There is a bathroom right after the water cooler in the hall, this is typically used by women. There is another bathroom around the corner (actually around the first corner then around the second corner) – this can be used for men.
- Coats/Boots: Parents can hang their coats and place their boots in the hallway cupboard.
- Coffee: You will find that the coffee decanters are filled with water and the basket is empty. In order to make coffee you will put a filter in the basket that slides out and empty one coffee bag into the filter. Be sure to check the names as the regular and decaf packages look the same. After your meeting you will need to empty the coffee filter/coffee into the garbage and rinse it prior to putting it back. Pour out any coffee and put the lid back on the decanter. Press the start button and the container will fill up with water. They are left to soak for the next day. The “ON” button stays on (is red). There is cream and milk in the fridge and sugar/tea / coffee filters in canisters on the counter beside the coffee machine.
- Evaluations

Introduce Tree of Life Concept

- Developed by Dulwich Centre (Training center in Australia which teaches narrative therapy) and REPSSI (NGO working to reduce the effects of poverty, conflict and HIV/AIDS across East/South Africa).
- Rooted in narrative therapy.
- It uses a tree as a metaphor to allow people to talk about their lives in ways that that are not retraumatizing, but in ways which strengthens their relationships, history and significant people in their lives.

Steps:

- The tree gives participants the opportunity to explore their:
 - History (Roots)
 - Emotions (Ground)
 - Skills/Knowledge (Trunk)
 - Hopes and Goals (Branches)
 - Important people in their lives (Leaves)
 - Gifts (Fruits)
 - Challenges (Storms) *To be completed in week 4*

Purpose

- After the trees are drawn the participants make a forest, and share parts of their tree with the group.
- Participants then begin to form new stories of their lives with the help of others in the group.
- Each participant leaves a comment leaf on another tree about a part of their story that resonated with them.
- This is done to re-story their lives with an alternate view, one that is more positive and gives a new meaning to whatever situation they are dealing with.

- When the storms are introduced the participants will explore the ways they overcame them, and also develop an alternate view of how to cope when future storms arise.

Facilitator Expectations

- Attend all sessions
- Respect the group rules (Revisit group rules)
- Share only what you are comfortable with

Participant Expectations

Discussion led by participants

Building Community

Why ‘Caring for the Caregiver’?

Many parents in this group routinely put their child’s needs ahead of their own. It is a natural response to the increased demands put on you as the primary caregiver. Unfortunately this makes it easy to forget to take care of yourself. Whether by choice, or not, the reality of caring for a child with complex needs is that you have, or will become an expert in the care of your child. You will learn exactly what their needs are and will learn to teach others how to care for your children. You fill many roles from first responder to advocate. The life of a caregiver is one stacked with ups and downs, which make it difficult to celebrate the highs, when you know it will inevitably be followed by a relative low.

- How does this definition relate to your own situation?
- Would you like to change this statement by adding to it, or taking away?

Introduction to Resiliency

Many overwhelming experiences can have a traumatic effect. However, not everyone who goes through a life-threatening event or severe crisis situation experiences ongoing traumatic stress responses. The impact of any single event or the cumulative impact of events is contingent on many different variables. There will always be some stress present in our lives. It is how we: prepare, react, cope, and are supported that affects our resilience. Many people always find ways to cope with the stress they experience, whether it is a strong relationship with helping professionals, informal supports, or respite care; parents have figured what they need to do to balance the demands that are put on them. The meaning we give our situation can also influence how resilient we are.

- What are some things you do to be resilient?
- What strategies are in place to prevent you from being overwhelmed?
- How do you know when you need a break?

10 Minute Break

Developing Your Capacity to be Resilient

- Participant-led
- Ideas for self-care *Handout*

- Creating a self-care plan: Physical, Psychological, Emotional, Spiritual *Handout*

Brief Overview of Trauma

Definition

Trauma is a wound that injures us emotionally, psychologically and physiologically. Trauma occurs when a person experiences a threat, which includes physical and psychological threats to oneself or others. We each have innate capabilities to respond to such situations and return to a state of equilibrium. However if the intensity or duration of the situation overwhelms our resilience, we may feel helpless, shame, or terror (add to list with participant suggestions). Those emotions and feelings then reduce our ability to re-establish a sense of relative safety, our built-in survival mechanisms remain on high alert continually responding to perceived threats; thus, we become *traumatized*.

- How does this definition relate to your situation?
- What parts of the definition do you disagree with?

Conversations about Stress

- Participant-led
- Key Concepts to highlight:
 - Fight, Flight, Freeze
 - Fear/anxiety
 - Re-experiencing trauma
 - Increased arousal
 - Avoidance
 - Guilt/shame
 - Depression
 - Grief
 - Self-image
 - Isolation/strained relationships

Closing

Summary

- **Community**
- **Tree of life**
- **Resiliency**
- **Self-care**
- **Trauma and Stress**

Debrief

- **Questions?**
- **Revisit expectations**
- **House Keeping: Food Preferences**
- **Evaluations**

Thank-you & Close