



## change is hard

Especially for caregivers, change can be overwhelming. On top of transitions in your own life, when those you care for go through change, you are right there experiencing it with them.

## reframe

On the flipside, change can be as beautiful as it is messy. Mother Nature illustrates this in the fall, as the trees begin changing into vibrant and beautiful colors. They shed their leaves and let go of today, unafraid of growing into what will be.

## three-minute activity

Take this time of change as an opportunity to reflect on what you can and can't control. Make a list and keep it close.

**Hint:** you can control the food you eat, how often you exercise and how you talk to yourself; you can't control when schools reopen, what's in the news and what other people think about you.



## **bittersweet holiday season**

Losses we've experienced can feel especially potent this time of year – for you and for those in your care. This can cause our loving family traditions to be mixed with sadness, isolation, and short tempers, fueling disconnection.

## **what grief looks like**

Maybe you'll recognize some of these undesired behaviors in yourself or others in the coming weeks: over-purchasing, over-consumption, lethargy, or irritability. These behaviors can be grief in disguise, pointing out where your attention is needed.

## **try this: time & acknowledgement**

Every feeling just wants to be seen and recognized, so ignoring the negative feelings doesn't make them go away. Try scheduling 10 minutes of "holiday blues" on your calendar and make a mental list of what (or who) you and your loved ones may be grieving this year. While it may sound counterintuitive, tending to your feelings of loss actually causes them to soften, not intensify. This can lead to more space for joy and moments of connection this holiday season.





## practicing balance

As someone caring for others, balancing your needs with those in your care is the hardest, but **most important** responsibility you have. You likely agree that to care for others, we must first care for ourselves, but thinking and doing are two very different things! Balance requires intention and takes practice, like building a muscle.

## 7-day activity

See if you can spend **10, 20, or 30 minutes a day on YOU, for the next 7 days.** Maybe it's over the lunch hour or in the evening when everyone else is in bed. Resist the urge catch up on work or tend to others; this time is just for YOU.

### Here are a few things that might feel great:

- go for a walk and listen to your favorite podcast
- plan YOUR healthy meals for the week
- do a 10 minute meditation to ease your mind
- spend a few extra minutes in the shower

Do the things your body and mind are asking of you, keeping your needs in balance with the needs of others.



## **a Thanksgiving for the history books**

This year's socially-distanced holidays may not include the hustle and bustle we're used to. How can we create experiences that keep us connected to our loved ones?

## **connect to your own history**

In this year of extraordinary global events, get grounded on the timeline of your own history through storytelling. When everything feels off kilter, story sharing is centering and reminds us we are rooted together.

## **telling stories together**

Get on the phone with a relative or family friend and tell stories! Ask for a story you've never heard or share ones you've told a hundred times. Tell stories about good luck, missed opportunity, or the mundane moments etched in your memory. Your grounding and connection through story will cascade to those around you.





## holiday eating

It seems like everything changes around the holidays including schedules, social expectations, and of course, our diets. Unfortunately, the most delicious holiday food is often the least healthy. This taxes our physical stamina, making holiday stress more difficult to endure.

## fuel up...literally!

Although change can feel overwhelming, chaotic and out of our control, change brings opportunities to double down on our wellbeing habits. Replace an old habit with a new one this week starting with.... vegetables! Give your body the energy it needs to take care of yourself and others this holiday season.

## opportunities to "veg"

Abstaining can be hard, so focus on *adding*.

- Add a bowl of baby carrots to the table, you'll probably pick at them just because they're there!
- Add some steam-in-a-bag frozen veggies to your holiday meals; it's cheap and easy.
- Add a handful of spinach to your favorite smoothie.



## we've lost so much this year

Have you reflected on what has been taken from you this year? By focusing on losses, we can address the pain that may be negatively impacting our emotional, mental, and physical health. More importantly, by facing our losses we can move forward and begin our healing process. The end of a cycle (year) is a beautiful time to do this. We can grieve over our losses, shed the pain and renew ourselves with the new year that lies ahead of us.

## ways to let it all out

Focus on what has been taken from you this year and find the best way for you to **GET IT OUT!**

- **Cry.** An Indigenous belief is that if you don't allow the tears to come out, they turn into poison...so let them flow.
- **Scream.** Grab a pillow and scream into it as loud as you can.
- **Sweat:** Run, box, dance, wrestle, or just shake your body.
- **Write.** Put your thoughts down on paper and burn or bury it.
- **Get outside.** Nature will listen to what you have to say.
- **Meditate.** Stop, clear your mind, inhale peace and exhale burden.

**Caregivers:** find our own way to release some of the pain of your losses. The tenderness this brings will be a blessing to you and those in your care.





## balance? really??

Balance? In 2020? Good one, right? This year has both amplified and challenged the need for balance, especially for caregivers. This is your friendly reminder: you are worthy of having your needs met, too! It is so important to balance your needs with the needs of others; they need you to be okay. Time and/or guilt often get in the way, but by creating balance and meeting your needs you establish a healthy habit for yourself and also others. Try giving yourself physical cues as reminders to remain balanced.

## practice balance, literally

Draw on the power of mind-body connection and focus on improving your *physical* balance. Balance work increases mental and physical agility, making you less prone to injury.

- **Tip toes:** Stand on your tip toes for 60 seconds.
- **Tree pose:** Prop the sole of your right foot on your left calf, creating a triangle shape. Extend your arms up. Switch legs.
- **Heel-to-toe walk.** Walk across the room in a straight line, touching heel to toe.

For an added challenge, try closing your eyes for a moment or two!



## darkness and light

The days are only just beginning to get longer in the Northern Hemisphere; there are still more hours of darkness than daylight. Seasonal celebrations include candles, stars, and lights to symbolize endurance, dedication, struggle, abundance, and finding your way.

## light your way

We have endured hardship this year. Look to lights as a reminder there is always an end to the darkness. Try one of these activities to bring more light to your days:

- Take an evening walk for stargazing.
- Make sugar cookies in the shape of stars.
- Paint the outside of an old jar with glue. Adhere cut-up pieces of tissue paper, sequins, old buttons, or glitter. Place a tea light or small candle inside to illuminate your design.
- Read or tell stories with kiddos under the covers with a flashlight.
- Make a list of 10 words that rhyme with "star," and write a short poem.





## forever connections

The words that change lives forever: "This is your HOME, not your *foster* home. We are a FAMILY, not a *foster* family."

## the feeling of family

Biological, chosen, aging, just-introduced, far away, or next door - we know family when we FEEL it. The feelings we get from being with family change everything.

## 2021 family chain

With just days left in 2020, draw your attention to those you make you *feel* like family and end the year with a plan to stay connected throughout 2021:

- Cut out twelve, 1" x 4" rectangle-shaped pieces of paper. Put the name of one person you call family on each piece. Staple them together, hook-and-loop, until you have a 12-link paper chain. For each month of 2021, take down one of the paper chain links and reach out to the person you wrote down. Send a text that simply says, "So glad we're family."



## secondary and ambiguous loss

Loss has a ripple effect. Grieving a primary loss is often accompanied with the grief of losing other less tangible treasures. The death of a loved one, for example, is a primary loss. Accompanying, secondary losses may include a sense of identity, social circle, or vision of the future. Perhaps you or your loved ones have experienced losses where your dreams for the future can no longer come true in the way you imagined.

## imagine how your future feels

Sometimes we don't know exactly what we want to do or have, but we can usually name the feelings we want to feel. Take 60 seconds of uninterrupted time to write down the feelings you want to feel this year. Maybe it's safe, protected, joyful, peaceful, lavished, magnetic, or free - it's up to you.

Next, grab a piece of scratch paper or sketch pad. Draw or cut out (from magazines/junk mail/random papers on your kitchen table) any images, lines, colors, or phrases that match your desired feelings. Visit and add to these often to feel more of what you want to feel in 2021.





## what is balance...for YOU?

Balance is a term we all throw out as our goal. A Google search of "How to find balance in your life" brings up 332,000,000 results! Are you clear about what balance looks and feels like to you? Maybe it means not being pulled too hard in one direction so you can be calm, clear, and purposeful in your life choices.

## recognizing balance

To know if you've been able to create balance, it can be helpful to ask yourself **two questions**:

1. When I take care of everything I need to do, is there time and energy to enjoy the things I want to do?
2. Can I get absorbed in something without worrying about another task or feeling guilty because I'm not doing something else?

Acknowledge the ways **you** feel balanced and accept that you cannot do everything all the time. **Your resources of time, energy, and money are limited. How do you want to spend them?**





## a fundamental human need

Connection is vital to our physical and mental health, and the wellbeing of our society. Prior to the pandemic, many of us became more conscious about trying to have in person connections rather than seem detached with technology. However, with the need for social distancing, it's okay to reframe that idea and creatively use technology to our advantage.

## more than Zoom

While many of us have screen fatigue, there are a lot of options for using technology to connect with others outside of Zoom.

- Play online games with friends using apps, such as Words with Friends or Game pigeon.
- Call or video-chat with friends while taking virtual tours together of museums, national parks, and more from Google Arts & Culture.
- Move together: plan walk-and-talk phone conversations for when you walk around your respective neighborhoods, or plan to attend the same online workouts.
- Tune in to live-streamed concerts and other events together.





## growth in the unknown

One of the most challenging things about change is the unknown. Not knowing what will happen next is a fear we often experience and causes us to stay stuck, immobilized.

But let's give this a reframe. One thing to consider about change is the opportunity for growth. An upside to change is the strength you gain in adaptability, and by definition, you only need to adapt when there is change!

## 3,2,1 activity - 3 changes, 2 steps, 1 need

Once you've recognized that change can lead to growth, get excited about where that might lead you and plan on making your OWN changes:

Write down the following as a way to get started:

- **3 things you want to change in your lifestyle.** Is it your thinking? Your morning routine? How you respond to interruptions? Pick one.
- **2 concrete, possible steps for the thing you want to change.** Set an alarm? Write a new thought script?
- **1 need you have in order to start.** A phone app? 20 minutes to focus? To set expectation with those around you?

*Now, go for it!*





## connected by loss

The inevitability of loss connects us deeply as human beings. The end of a relationship, or loss of a home, job, or loved one can come with great pain, leaving you feeling unbalanced and challenged for even the most basic tasks of living.

We may not choose the “growing pains” that come with loss but we can recognize loss as a catalyst for our own restoration, healing and transformation - emotionally, physically, and mentally.

## the 5 C's

Prepare for your recovery from loss with the 5 Cs:

1. **Carry your strength.** You have weathered tough situations in the past that have prepared you for this challenge.
2. **Connect with others.** Most humans do their best healing in the context of a connected relationship.
3. **Consider ways to honor your loss.** There are reasons we utilize rituals; borrow from this idea to honor whatever loss you are going through.
4. **Conjure up possibilities to improve or change your life.**  
Capitalize on the opportunity that comes with change.
5. **Claim joy by doing something that makes you happy.** Doing something to honor or celebrate life can help you sail, even through stormy seas.





## **sleep: harder than it sounds, but oh so important!**

Caregiving of any kind is super challenging without adequate sleep. Sleep is one of the pillars of the 3-legged stool of health: Eat (nutrition), Move (exercise), and Sleep. Adults need 7-9 hours of sleep per night. With one leg of the stool weak or missing, it's wobbly and balance becomes harder to find.

## **ways to get a solid night's rest**

### **Try these quick tips on *getting to sleep*:**

- Keep a set bedtime and a regular bedtime routine to tell your brain "it's time for sleep" and eliminate screen time at least 30-min before bedtime to begin to relax your brain
- Clear your mind before bed—keep paper at your bedside and write down what's on your mind, take a warm bath, meditate or listen to a sleep app like CALM

### **Try these to help you *stay asleep*:**

- Keep your room cool; between 60-67 degrees is ideal
- Avoid eating or drinking (especially caffeine or alcohol) 2 hours before bed (or consider giving them up altogether!)
- Keep your sleeping space DARK. Use an eye mask, room-darkening shades, and cover glowing lights with electrical tape.
- If you wake up, stay quiet and still, without touching your phone; keeping it out of reach can help





## hitting the "pandemic wall?"

We've been isolated for a year now and you may be experiencing in ancient Greek what is called, "acedia," or mental fatigue, spiritual sloth, and dampening of the human spirit. Sound or feel familiar? During these extra challenging times, caregivers have the extra challenging job of getting through this listlessness and supporting others to do the same. We must first make sure we are "okay."

## antidotes to enliven and renew your spirit

Incorporate one or more of the following into your life every day:

- **Introduce novelty**—Try something new like listening to a new genre of music, rearranging furniture, or driving to a new place.
- **Play, laugh, and create**—Watch a comedian, play board games from your youth, play with playdoh, or take up a new instrument.
- **Sleep and rest**—Do whatever you need to do to get your sleep! And find ways to rest even when you are awake.
- **Get physically active**—Movement gives us the natural endorphins we need to renew our sense of wellbeing.
- **Be in nature**—Get outside as much as possible, even just to walk around the block. Sunshine and fresh air enliven a droopy spirit.
- **Spend time with loved ones**—Even virtual time can do the trick. There's nothing more powerful than love; it's the antidote to nearly everything that ails you!





"I think everything in life is art. What you do. How you dress. The way you love someone, and how you talk. Your smile and your personality. What you believe in. The way you drink your tea. How you decorate your home. Or party. Your grocery list. The food you make. How your writing looks. And the way you feel.

**Life is art."**

-Helena Bonham Carter

## **your life is your art, your message**

Mahatma Gandhi was asked by a reporter, "What is your message to the world?" His answer, "My life is my message."

**Hear this today, Dear Caregiver:** the change you make, the change that you are, the transformation you nurture in others: this is your message to the world. You are an artist and your life is your art. Live in that truth today.