

Controlling Your Frustration: A Class for Caregivers

Course Outline and Program

- Class 1: Understanding Frustration
- Class 2: The ABC Model
- Class 3: Danger Signals, Stop Signs and Adaptive Thoughts
- Class 4: Identifying and Correcting Unhelpful Thoughts
- Class 5: Diary of Thoughts and Personal Declarations
- Class 6: Being Assertive and the Broken Record Technique
- Class 7: Accepting Your Assertive Rights
- Class 8: Review and Conclusion

Class #1: Understanding Frustration

What We Will Cover in Class #1:

1. Class Format
2. Several Sources of Frustration
3. Relaxation Exercise
4. Homework for the next class

Class Format

Consistency

We would like you to watch one video segment per week. Each segment is based on the preceding session. Skipping ahead to a topic that seems interesting is not a good idea because you will miss the important information that leads up to it. We would ask that you watch each video in order, with a week between each viewing. This schedule will allow you the time needed to practice the new skills you learn. It might be helpful to choose one time during the week to view each video. Choose a time when you will be able to focus your attention on the video, without distractions.

Give Yourself Time!

We want to be sure that you take the time you need in each segment to do the exercises and answer questions. Be sure to stop the video when prompted, and participate in the suggested activity. Give yourself that time to learn the new skill and to practice it!

Overcoming Challenges

Here is an example of how one viewer handled these challenges. Jean was really enthusiastic about watching the video so that she could learn new skills for handling her stress. At the end of the second week, she was disappointed that she had only practiced relaxation twice, and had not finished the reading assignment. She decided to make a list of situations that got in her way of watching the video and practicing relaxation.

Here is her list of things that got in the way:

1. *I kept forgetting.*
2. *Dad was following me around.*
3. *I was too busy with more urgent things yesterday.*
4. *Once, when I started my relaxation, my friend called me, and by the time we finished talking, I had to start dinner.*
5. *I was so nervous and frustrated when a stressful time came that I didn't use the things I learned.*

Jean then figured out a plan that would handle these obstacles, and chose the following strategies:

- * *For problems 1 and 2, I will set aside time on Mon., Wed, Thurs., Fri., Sat, and Sun from 9:00 to 9:30 to do the reading and practice relaxation. These are times when Dad is happy watching TV.*
- * *For problem 3, since this video can help my whole family and me (if I am feeling less stress), I need to make it a priority. Thirty minutes a day is not too much; I'll remind myself that I deserve this time.*
- * *For problem 4, I'll ignore the phone and let the answering machine take messages.*
- * *For problem 5, I can write down helpful ideas or short statements on 3x5 cards to carry with me. The card could say something like "I deserve credit for trying a new approach with Dad, even if it didn't work all that well." I can make a short audio tape of helpful statements that I can use to calm myself down during stressful times. I can also reward myself with a cup of my favorite tea whenever I practice the things I learned in the video.*

On the next page, take some time to think about the challenges in your situation. What things might get in the way of watching the video and doing the suggested activities? How might you overcome these potential problems?

Before You Begin!

My Plan for Overcoming the Challenges of Watching the Video and Fully Participating in the Program:

Write down the things that may get in the way of you watching the video and doing the suggested activities (obstacles). Then list strategies for overcoming these potential problems.

Obstacles:

- 1.**
- 2.**
- 3.**
- 4.**

Strategies:

- 1.**
- 2.**
- 3.**
- 4.**

Let's take a moment to think about a few things that might help motivate you if you feel stuck:

1. What would you like to get out of the class?

2. Of your friends and family, who can offer the best support as you learn about coping with frustration?

3. How can you make the most of the video?

1st Part of the Reading

Emotions Related to

Caregiving

Providing care for an ill relative may be one of the most challenging experiences of your life. With the challenges come emotions, both pleasant and unpleasant. In this section, we will focus on providing you with background information regarding different aspects of the caregiving situation that are likely to trigger strong emotional reactions.

We have gathered this material from our experiences with caregivers like yourself. We wish to thank all the caregivers who have participated in developing these classes, for sharing their personal lives and experiences with us.

How We Respond to a Situation

There are many things that influence the way we respond emotionally to a situation. Our responses may reflect our fears, expectations, and values, to name a few. Emotions are not “right” or “wrong,” or “good” or “bad.” They are simply a part of what makes us who we are. It is important to acknowledge our emotions while, at the same time deal with things objectively, based on our understanding of a situation.

How We Think About a Situation

As you will learn later in this class, the way we think about a situation plays a big role in determining how we respond emotionally. The same situation may make one person feel angry, depressed and resentful, while making another person feel funny, calm and accepting. You will later learn to identify how your thinking may be leading to unnecessary stress, anger, and depression.

Caregivers' emotions are closely related to the way they cope with certain aspects of the caregiving situation. Some of the aspects of the caregiving situation that most strongly affect the way caregivers feel include:

1. Your relationship to the ill relative.
2. The stage of the illness or degree and kinds of impairment experienced by the ill relative.
3. Other responsibilities and obligations you have which compete with caregiving, such as the demands of other family members and your job.
4. Your general physical and emotional health.

The caregiver's relationship to the ill relative may result in unique problems. Are you caring for a spouse, a parent, or a parent-in-law? Each of these

relationships may be stressful in different ways.

Caring for a Spouse

For spouses, caregiving often means a substantial change in roles. The caregiver often takes on duties previously assumed by the ill spouse. Some of these duties, such as handling finances, repairs, household concerns, and transportation, may be unpleasant or may appear overwhelming to the caregiver. The caregiver may then feel frustrated, angry and resentful. These feelings are a normal part of the situation and should not alarm you. Learning how to cope with strong feelings so that they don't get out of hand is also important. Part of what we will do in this class is help you learn new and helpful ways to deal with frustration, anger and resentment.

Feeling Alone

Caregivers who are caring for a spouse often feel especially alone in the caregiving situation. There may be several reasons for this. For many caregivers, the mental decline of their spouse signals the gradual loss of their closest friend and emotional support. After years of turning to their life-partner, these caregivers often find themselves at a loss for support and assistance when faced with the demands of caregiving.

Feelings of Intimacy

Spouse caregivers must also deal with the possible change in sexual intimacy with the ill relative. Because of changes in the demented spouse's personality,

sharing social or physical intimacy may not seem as close as it had before.

These changes may cause the caregiver to feel guilty for continuing to turn to the ill relative for physical intimacy.

Feelings of depression and loss are common, yet by changing some of the things you as a caregiver do on a regular basis you can lessen these feelings. Seeking support from family and friends can also help.

Retirement Years

Spouses may also feel resentful and angry at not being able to spend their retirement years as planned. Just when someone expected to be able to relax, he or she is more tied down than ever, possibly with serious financial problems due to medical costs.

Turning to Others for Support

As the ill spouse's condition worsens, spouse caregivers may feel guilty turning to others to meet emotional and social needs. Spouses may find it especially difficult to use respite or long-term care because they fear breaking the loyalty and fidelity of their relationship. Yet they may need to confront their guilty feelings, assess them realistically, and then seek help from friends and family members, or others in the community.

Caring for a Parent or a Parent-in-law

Caring for a parent often leads to a role reversal in which the adult child

caregiver must take on the role of the parent. The caregiver may need to perform very personal duties for the relative such as bathing, feeding and changing which can lead to feelings of discomfort, embarrassment and confusion. Caring for a parent can result in many changes in the personal life of the adult child caregiver who often has a family of her own and may also have a job outside of the home.

Feeling Pulled in Many Directions

Taking on the task of caring for an ailing parent can be an extreme emotional and physical strain. This is especially true if the parent has to move into the caregiver's home. The caregiver may feel pulled in numerous directions and be unable to meet as many of the needs of his or her loved ones as before. It's common for the needs of the caregiver's own spouse and children to take a back seat, in light of the often overwhelming demands of caregiving for an ill parent. This can place a tremendous strain on families, and can make everyone feel bitter, unhappy and frustrated.

Loss of privacy

The presence of a parent or parent-in-law in the home may put a damper on one's intimate relations with a spouse. Caring for an ill person can cause fatigue and take away some of the privacy we're accustomed to. This can make sharing affection difficult,

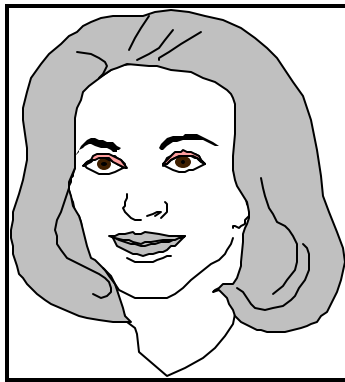
precisely at a time when caregivers most need family understanding and caring. So, it's understandable that adult children caring for an aging, disabled parent will feel depressed, angry, frustrated, or guilty. But you as the caregiver are not alone in this. Many others have been in the same situation and have been able to learn adaptive ways to cope with their many feelings. Also, some caregivers report that they can find positive aspects of the situation that make them feel good about the sacrifices they are making for their parents.

Stages of the Illness

During the beginning stage of a dementing illness, such as Alzheimer's Disease, the caregiver must deal with the slow and often confusing onset of their relative's memory problems. At times the relative appears well, while at other times it appears clear that he or she has a serious problem remembering things, thinking clearly, or finding his or her way around. This confusing pattern often leads to misunderstandings, unrealistic expectations, and frustration in the caregiver and other family members.

Explaining the Changes to Others

Although problems with memory and general functioning are apparent to those who are close to the ill relative,



those who have only casual or infrequent contact may not notice any changes. This can result in great frustration for the caregiver who tries to explain the situation to others. Some adult children, although concerned and supportive, often fail to understand the significance of the early changes in their ill parent. As a result, they may be slow in offering any real help to the caregiver. Bringing family members together to talk things out frankly and openly can help, as can discussing ideas and suggestions for sharing the caregiving load more fairly.

Limiting Your Relative's Independence

One of the earliest hurdles caregivers must overcome is limiting the ill relative's sense of autonomy and independence.

There are few things more difficult than having to tell a spouse or parent that they can no longer drive, or manage their financial affairs by themselves. Understandably, many caregivers put off imposing necessary restrictions on the frail elder because they fear angering and alienating their loved one. Yet, caregivers do need to find solutions, and to curtail their family member's independence, to reflect the reality of what is happening. Caregivers need a great deal of support and encouragement in order to make appropriate decisions in these matters.

For more information on emotions and many other aspects of caregiving, please see the book, *The 36-Hour Day*, by Nancy Mace and Peter Rabins, published in a revised edition, in 1991, by the Johns Hopkins University Press,. Their book provides an excellent discussion of the various emotions caregivers experience and suggests some helpful suggestions for dealing with the many demands of caregiving. It is available in both Spanish and English.

Previous Conflicts

Previous conflicts in a relationship, particularly those which were unresolved prior to the family member's illness, can be a source of considerable distress for the caregiver. For example, if a caregiver feels confused and angry about a problem she had before her relative became ill, she may feel both guilty and resentful when she has to make decisions about her ill relative's care.

Abuse and Neglect

Caregivers who were previously abused physically, emotionally or sexually by the ill relative, may find themselves at risk for mistreating the relative or neglecting the relative's serious needs. Caregivers who abuse or neglect their ill relative are often unaware of the harm it causes because their earlier negative experiences are clouding their judgment. As the disease progresses, the demented relative's older abusive patterns of behavior may reappear. This may cause the caregiver to once again feel guilty, shameful and angry. These caregivers could benefit from individual counseling with a trained professional, to help them sort out their feelings.

2nd Part of the Reading

The Gift of Relaxation

Although we don't often think about it this way, when we allow ourselves a few moments to relax, we are really giving ourselves a gift. We are saying to ourselves, "It's OK to slow down, to take some deep breaths, and give myself a chance to relax." This is particularly important in very stressful situations, such as caregiving, when we might feel as though we are running from one crisis to another. It's also important in situations which easily frustrate or anger us.

It's very difficult, if not impossible, to think clearly when we are overcome with emotions such as anger and frustration. As you will learn in this class, being able to be more objective in stressful situations and to recognize ways of thinking that make us more upset is key to coping in the caregiving situation. If our thoughts are racing, our heart is pumping rapidly, we're filled with strong, negative emotions. In times like this, we have little chance of dealing with the situation effectively. This can be hard, both on ourselves, and on those we are caring for.

Preparing Us to Confront Problems

Learning to relax can prepare us so that when we find ourselves confronted with something stressful, we can take a few deep breaths and handle the situation better. During each of the classes, you will be given the opportunity to practice a relaxation

exercise. One of the instructors will guide you through the exercise. Then, during the week, we would like you to practice the exercise at least once a day. It is important to find a time when you can have about 10 minutes to yourself. We know this isn't easy for caregivers to do. You may need to be creative, getting up early or staying up a little later, taking the time in your car when you are running an errand, etc.

Calming the Body

At first, you may find it very difficult to relax. That's normal. The most important point is to concentrate on breathing deeply and slowly, and to relax every muscle in your body. Calming the body is the first step to calming the mind. Concentrate on relaxing each part of your body, beginning with your hands and feet, and working your way up to your head. While you are breathing slowly and relaxing your body, you will probably hear a lot of noisy thoughts in your mind. In order to relax your mind, think of something positive, such as a safe, quiet place, and repeat a calming word, such as "peace" or "calm," silently to yourself.

If you would like, you may find it helpful to include prayer in your relaxation time. This is perfectly fine. You may want to include a religious symbol or figure in your safe place, or to repeat a holy name or prayer to yourself. Remember to keep taking slow, deep breaths and to relax all your muscles.

Keep Practicing

Also, we would like you to keep a record of each of the times you practice the relaxation exercise. Some weeks you may be able to practice everyday and others, only once or twice. Just keep practicing. As with anything, learning something new takes time.

Keeping Track of Your Progress

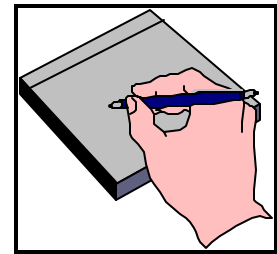
Each time you do the relaxation exercise, use the form we have given you to note your level of tension before and after you do the exercise. On the form you will find a thermometer that goes from 1 to 5. "One" means you feel no tension at all. "Five" means you feel very, very tense. This will help you keep track of how much your tension is reduced from the relaxation and how much progress you make over time.

Making Relaxation a Part of the Class

When you come to class, the instructor will ask how your relaxation exercises went during the week. This will be a good time for you to talk about the difficulties you have had with the relaxation exercise. If you are having trouble filling out the relaxation forms, ask the instructor to explain them more clearly. You can also offer suggestions to other class members about what you have found helpful.

Homework to Do Before Class #2:

1. Daily Relaxation Practice. Use the Relaxation Diary to rate your level of tension.
2. Readings from page 7

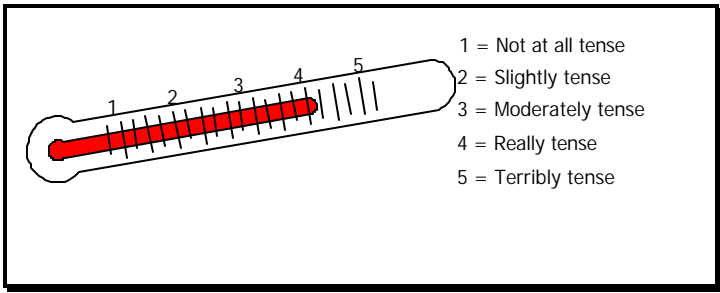


through this page. We will discuss | these pages during the next class.

Please Use This Space for Taking Notes

Relaxation Diary: Tension Rating Scale

Use This Scale to Rate Your Level of Tension



In-Class Practice Rating:

Before the relaxation exercise, I felt (rate your tension from 1 to 5): _____

After the relaxation exercise, I felt (rate your tension from 1 to 5): _____

DATE__	TENSION__	COMMENTS (why I felt this way, etc.)
	Before relaxing: _____ After relaxing: _____	
	Before relaxing: _____ After relaxing: _____	
	Before relaxing: _____ After relaxing: _____	
	Before relaxing: _____ After relaxing: _____	
	Before relaxing: _____ After relaxing: _____	
	Before relaxing: _____ After relaxing: _____	
	Before relaxing: _____ After relaxing: _____	
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