YOUNG caregivers ASSOCIATION

ADVOCATING MEANS SPEAKING-UP FOR YOURSELF AND THE THINGS THAT ARE IMPORTANT TO YOU

HOW TO ADVOCATE FOR YOURSELF

Express your needs and desires within **your family**:

- To help with big feelings like being overwhelmed or stressed out, it is important to keep the lines of communication open in your family.
- Even though we care for people in our families, it is okay that we need care too.
- In order for us to get the support we need, first we have to make sure that we let those around us know.
- We can do this by finding the way that works best to communicate your thoughts. For some people this can be just having a conversation, but for others they may struggle to say their feelings out loud. If you struggle with this, try writing down your feelings, wants, and needs and giving this letter to your family members.

Express to **healthcare professionals** that you are an active participant in your loved one's care:

- It can be helpful to let your loved one's healthcare team know that you are part of their support team.
- This can allow you to be a part of the conversation to provide them information, or ideas from your own experience.
- Sometimes doctors, nurses and other healthcare members struggle to listen to a young caregiver. If this is happening for you, use that communication to let your other family members know if you want to be involved. They can help pass this information along to the healthcare team.
- If you do not want to be involved in this aspect of your loved one's care, that is also okay! There are lots of ways to be a young caregiver and no one way is the right way. If it feels good for you, then that is the right way to support your loved one.

Talk to **teachers, principals, employers,** and others about your caregiving role:

- It can feel like we should keep our caregiving to ourselves so we don't burden those around us. However, teachers, principals, employers, and others in leadership roles are there to help us do the best job that we can. Letting them know about what is happening in our lives can make space for this.

- This can help us advocate for strategies that may be helpful for our caregiving role, or our mental health. Things like:
  - Having permission to have your cell phone on you in case someone needs to reach out.
  - Having more time to complete an assignment if our family member is not doing well.
  - Having someone at school/work to talk to.
  - Tell professors, administrators, work supervisors, and friends about your caring role and the ways it impacts your life.

ASK FOR HELP WHEN YOU NEED IT

- Seek out extended family members, neighbours, or friends to help with caregiving tasks, or to give you a break.

- Taking a break or asking for help does not mean that we love our family member any less, but that we want to make sure that we are able to care for them to the best of our ability. Having support can make sure we can do this

- You may also wish to contact supportive organizations for help.

KEEP AN EYE ON YOUR MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

- In order for us to provide the best care to others, we also need to make sure we are taking care of ourselves.
  - Take breaks (even just for a few minutes)
  - Practice self-care
  - Exercise and maintain a healthy diet
  - Keep up to date with your own doctor's appointments

- You may wish to attend support groups and/or seek out a mental health professional if it feels right for you.

Get involved

- There are a lot of different ways to get involved in the young caregiver community or to advocate for support and change.
- Call or write your government representatives and vote if you are of age to.
- Look online for caregiving support resources or networks to get involved, like the Young Caregivers Association!
- You could start a blog about your experience as a young caregiver or post videos to YouTube.
- You may also want to share your caregiving story through participation in caregiver research studies; this can be an impactful way to help other caregivers on a wider scale!

To learn more about your role as a young caregiver, visit **YoungCaregivers.ca/KnowledgeCentre**

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