

**PARTNERS IN PERINATAL HEALTH CONFERENCE
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**“Caring for the Caregiver”
ADVANCED WORKSHOP**

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Objectives:

Upon completion, participants will be able to:

- Bear witness to another person’s pain, trauma or turmoil may leave the caregiver with unexpected feelings and responses.
- Explore the range of emotions and our own levels of risk for burnout and vicarious trauma.
- Learn innovative strategies for preventing and healing from the inherent stress of providing care.

Outline

- I. Stress
- II. Relaxation
- III. Strategies, techniques and ideas
- IV. Stress busters
- V. Times to try Stress Busters
- IV. Affirmations
 - a. Reward yourself every time you take a small step toward relaxation and self care.

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Please note that these materials are hand-outs that will accompany this experiential workshop. They do not represent the structure of the workshop..

CARING FOR THE CAREGIVER

A frequently overlooked principle of care giving involves caring for the caregiver.

In our work with families, we often help mothers and families that are in pain, have experienced birth or other trauma or have violent histories. When we leave their homes, we may carry the experience.

Bearing witness to another person's pain, trauma or turmoil may leave us with unexpected feelings and responses. In this workshop we will explore the range of responses and feelings we carry that may interfere with our own care. We will explore strategies for preventing and healing from the inherent stress of our work.

Stress

- Stress is the perception of a threat to one's physical or psychological well-being and the perception that one's responses are inadequate to cope
- Stress can be our body's way to help us cope with danger or it may help us focus
- The stress response is usually automatic
- Much of the stress our body makes works against us. Many of us feel stressed much of the time. If we feel stressed through the day we start to feel tired, sick, and irritable and may become ill

Relaxation

- Techniques to use to relax our bodies and our minds. The mind and body are connected which means that when we relax our bodies we reduce tension throughout
- A major goal of relaxation techniques is to break the stress cycle and refocus
- Relaxation is a state of focused awareness coupled with an attitude of interest. This mental attitude bypasses the "inner

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dialogue” of ordinary thought, thereby decreasing arousal of the stress response

- Relaxation is voluntary and requires practice
- Relaxation reduces muscle tension, quiets the mind, increases our ability to focus, gets us out of our conditioned responses and promotes problem solving

Strategies, techniques and ideas

- “Mini” relaxation exercises – these are focused breathing techniques which help reduce anxiety and tension immediately and take minutes. You can do them any place, at any time, and no one will know. Switch to diaphragmatic breathing; try breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth. Feel your stomach rise about an inch as you breathe in, and fall about an inch as you breathe out. Try to relax your stomach muscles.
- Mini Versions
 1. Count very slowly to yourself from ten down to zero, one number for each breath.
 2. As you inhale count very slowly up to four; as you exhale count slowly back down to one. Do this several times.
 3. After each inhalation pause for a few seconds; after you exhale pause again for a few seconds. Do this for several breaths.

The only time that minis do not work is when you forget to do them!!

- Gazing
Pick an object to look at, one that you find relaxing (perhaps a tree, a cloud, plant, flower, candle or art object.) Gently look at this object, clearing your mind of other thoughts. Notice the shape of the object, the color, size and texture; all of the details. When other thoughts enter your mind watch the thoughts and bring your attention back to the object. Try this for several minutes. Deep breathing while gazing will enhance your relaxation.
- Repetition

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Choose a word, a cluster of words, a prayer, a phrase, a mantra or repetitive muscular activity such as swinging your arms or slow walking. When thoughts intrude watch them and move back to the repetitive action.

Stress Busters – activities that may help to break the stress cycle
(make sure to find ones that work for YOU.)

- Meet a friend for tea or for breakfast
- Dance
- Laugh
- Take a short walk
- Pick up five pieces of litter
- Engage in a “silent scream.” Scoop up frustrations by breathing in, stamp your feet, shake your arms and silently scream as you slowly breathe out.
- Ask yourself, “where is my breath?”
- Sit for a few minutes in a quiet environment
- Sing
- Shoot hoops
- Choose to pause
- Tighten a muscle and then release it
- Put out a jigsaw puzzle and add a piece or two
- With your eyes open drop your lower jaw and rest your tongue on the bottom of your mouth
- Jump
- Count out loud
- Play with a child
- Play with an animal
- Garden
- Knit

Times to Try Stress Busters

- While your car is warming up
- When you are put on ‘hold’ during a phone call
- When someone cuts you off in traffic
- When someone says something that bothers you
- At a red light

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- When you feel overwhelmed by what you need to accomplish
- When in pain
- While standing in line
- In a waiting room
- Whenever you feel muscular tension

Affirmations

Reward yourself every time you take a small step toward relaxation and self-care with affirmations such as:

I am doing my best

Every step I take is healthy for me

I did it!

I have done my best

I have taken an important step

I am developing a healthy practice

I can say "yes" to myself

I am inhaling peace

I am on a river of healing

I am calming my mind

I am practicing self-care

Materials adapted from the work of Benson-Henry Institute for Mind/Body Medicine at MGH, Janet Cromer, Ali Domar and Jeanne F. Martin