



Tools for Caring

Connection

— THE DANCE OF CARE

CREATED BY
Josephine Tite

I was once chatting with a Health Care Aide, Joy Tamse, who works in a dementia care neighborhood. During our chat I asked her how she was able to find so much joy in her work. She told me, “I just dance to the rhythm of their music.” To this day, I am inspired by her words.

When two people come together in a dance they are allowing their entire being to respond to the rhythm. The long and short sounds compose music and the two people become one as the dance flows, relying on the rhythm of the music to be felt so deeply in their hearts that their bodies respond intuitively.

Providing care is like a dance. Imagine listening and being present to the inner rhythm of the person you are with. Leaning into empathy to see the world from their eyes. Relating to who they are, their inner most thoughts and emotions, their fears and their sense of significance as a person. Seeing them as whole and complete.

How might you choose to respond to their rhythm?

Would you relate differently to their needs?

In health care, we call this Patient-Centred Care. It's a partnership, where the person receiving care has a critical role to play in their goals, their care plan, their interventions, and treatments. Their opinions and preferences are taken into consideration. The person who is supported is given space to make decisions about their care. In that space and as a caregiver you are willing not to be the expert and make all the decisions, rather allow the person you support and love the opportunity to share in the decision making. It's a relationship, and a difficult one to prioritize, a challenging dance to maintain.


Although much attention surrounding the burdens and stresses of caregiving has been researched, it's appropriate to acknowledge the many gains and benefits as well. The feeling of pride in the ability to meet challenges, improvements in self-worth, closeness in relationships, and enhancing meaning. (See Kramer, 1997, for review). Described as “The Uplifts of Caregiving” and “The Satisfaction of Caregiving” it's important to note that caregivers can experience joy and gain in their roles.

How much of your experience has been defined by the world and the social structure that was in place before you even became a caregiver?

How did it come to mean what it does?

Why does caregiver burnout exist?



A watercolor illustration of a bee with a yellow and black body, positioned on the left side of the page. Below the bee, there are blue flowers with green leaves, also rendered in a watercolor style. The background is a light, textured white.

We have a human tendency to study and pay attention to life's challenges more so than life's advantages - it is part of being human. In Positive Psychology we call this The Negativity Bias, where our brains notice what's not good before we notice the good. We feel the intensity of difficulties over the intensity of moments of happiness. Consequently, studies have shown the consequences of caregiving, the stresses, the depression and health issues that arise.

Remember that a caregiver's journey is also a blessing. It is an opportunity to spend time differently with others and recognize a flow of giving and receiving between people in relationship with one another. We can refer to these blessings as Positive Aspects of Caregiving (PAC), although not yet clearly defined it deserves a deeper review. Studies found that that positive aspects caregivers experience depend largely on the quality of the relationship between caregiver and the person receiving care, social support and how much burden is perceived to be present (De Labra, et al. 2015). How you frame your role, perceive your role as caregiver and the support you access then impacts the benefits you will notice and experience. Caregiving can provide caregivers an opportunity to experience a sense of mastery, enjoy being with the person you support, and an additional sense of meaning in your life (De Labra, et al. 2015).

Are you noticing more struggles or abundances?

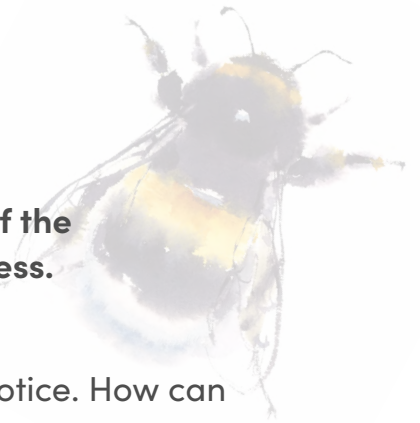
Are you paying attention to the benefits or feeling stuck in the stresses?

There will always be stresses and challenges in your role. How you make sense of those stresses and challenges, how you make them matter is what matters. Your role as a partner in care is to hold space, create awareness of the humanness of another and connect deep enough to join them in a dance, to the rhythm of their music.

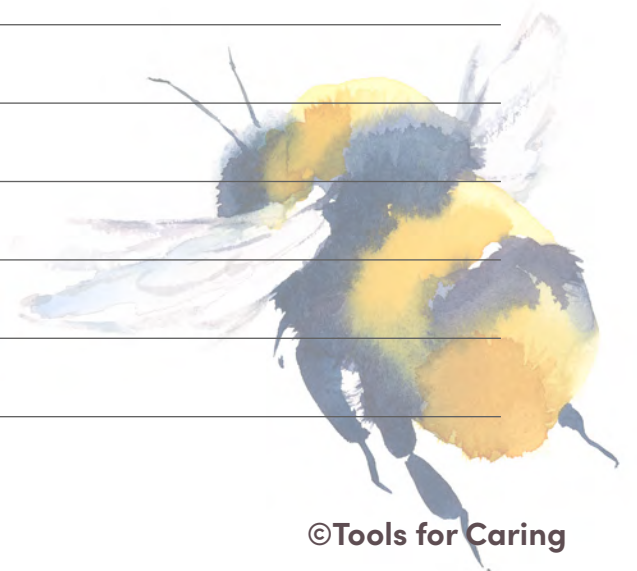
Your Connect Journey: Here is where you start to dance.

CONNECTION EXPERIENCES

The following activities will help you connect with the rhythm of the person you're caring for, and connect with yourself in the process.



- 1. Connect to the Rhythm.** Pick a piece of music. Listen. Notice. How can the music help you in your role? How can you incorporate connection in your daily tasks? What piece might the person you support select? Why? What is the connection to the music for them?





2. Respond to your role. Write your role description. How would you like it to be? How do you see care in your mind? How do you feel care in your heart? Where do you go first?

3. Benefits of Caring. Write about a time that you were cared for physically, or emotionally, or cognitively? Who has cared for you? How did they care for you? How does the person you care for, care for you?



4. Create Space. Notice when you step out of being the one in charge. Can you give the person you support a chance to step up in their care? Where can they contribute? What are their capacities? What is their potential?





References

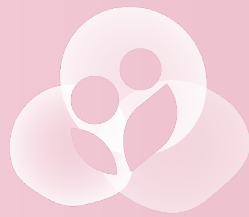
De Labra, Carmen, Millán-Calenti, José C, Buján, Ana, Núñez-Naveira, Laura, Jensen, Anders M, Peersen, Merete Charlotte, Mojs, Ewa, Samborski, Wlodzimierz, and Maseda, Ana. "Predictors of Caregiving Satisfaction in Informal Caregivers of People with Dementia." *Archives of Gerontology and Geriatrics* 60.3 (2015): 380-88. Web.

Kramer, B J. "Gain in the Caregiving Experience: Where Are We? What Next?" *The Gerontologist* 37.2 (1997): 218-32. Web.

"I define connection as the energy that exists between people when they feel seen, heard, and valued; when they can give and receive without judgment; and when they derive sustenance and strength from the relationship."

-Brene Brown





Tools for Caring

