Ageing Well

WP3/ A1- Activity 2

Module F: Compassion Fatigue and the Importance of Self-Care

Institute of Development (IoD)

Lesson Plan 4: Support Systems

Overview of the module

This module emphasizes the importance of support systems for caregivers, focusing on the role of social, professional, and community networks in preventing compassion fatigue. By identifying, building, and leveraging support networks, caregivers can enhance resilience, manage stress, and create a more sustainable caregiving experience.

Objective:

To help caregivers identify existing and potential support networks, recognize gaps in their current support systems, and develop an action plan to strengthen their caregiving network.

Duration: 60 minutes in total (including all activities)

Activities:

1. Introduction to Support Systems (10 minutes)
2. Support System Mapping (15 minutes)
3. Role-Playing Scenarios (15 minutes)
4. Action Planning, Sharing and Feedback (20 minutes)

Materials needed:

For Activity 1: Whiteboard, markers.

For Activity 2: Handouts with support system templates, pens.

For Activity 3: Role-play scripts for caregiving scenarios.

For Activity 4: Action plan worksheet, pens. whiteboard and markers.

Learning outcomes:

By the end of this lesson, participants will:

- o Recognize the importance of support systems in preventing compassion fatigue and fostering resilience.
- o Identify gaps in their current support systems and develop a plan to expand their network.
- o Gain confidence in reaching out for help and setting boundaries within their support systems.
- o Create a realistic and actionable plan to strengthen their caregiving network.

List of sources and references related to the activity:

Thoits, P. A. (2011). Mechanisms linking social ties and support to physical and mental health. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 52(2), 145-161.

Uchino, B. N. (2006). Social support and health: A review of physiological processes potentially underlying links to disease outcomes. *Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, 29(4), 377-387.

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Activity 1: Introduction to Support Systems

ACTIVITY 1: Introduction to Support Systems

Short description of the theoretical context of the activity:

Support systems play a vital role in buffering against compassion fatigue, offering emotional, social, and practical assistance that enhances resilience and well-being. Caregivers benefit greatly from strong support networks that reduce stress and provide avenues for self-care.

Aims and objectives of the activity:

- o Introduce the importance of support systems in caregiving.

- o Identify different types of support (social, professional, community) and their benefits.

- o Encourage participants to consider which types of support they rely on and where they might need additional help.

Materials Needed:

- o Whiteboard and markers

Duration of the activity: 10 minutes in total

Description of the process of the activity:

Step 1: **Discuss Support Systems and Their Benefits**

- o   Explain that support systems offer emotional and practical assistance, crucial for caregiver resilience and well-being and highlight various types of support: social (friends and family), professional (colleagues, supervisors), and community (support groups, organizations). Video Link

Step 2: **Participant Reflection**

- o   Invite participants to briefly share which types of support they currently rely on most and where they feel additional support could benefit them.

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Activity 2: Support System Mapping

ACTIVITY 2: Support System Mapping

Short description of the theoretical context of the activity:

Mapping support systems helps caregivers visualize their network of support and identify areas for potential growth. This exercise allows caregivers to see where they can strengthen their connections and expand their network.

Aims and objectives of the activity:

- o Guide participants in creating a visual map of their current support systems.

- o Encourage recognition of gaps in support and potential areas for growth.

- o Foster awareness of community and professional resources available for caregivers.

Materials Needed:

- o Handouts with support system templates

- o Pens and paper

Duration of the activity: 15 minutes in total

Description of the process of the activity:

Step 1: **Create a Support System Map**

Provide each participant with a blank template with three main sections, each labeled to guide them in mapping out their support network:

● **Template Structure:**

1. **Social Support**: Family, friends, close relationships.
2. **Professional Support**: Colleagues, supervisors, mentors.
3. **Community Support**: Support groups, local organizations, online communities.

Participants can use symbols, color-coding, or simply write names to represent different members of their network. Encourage them to:

● Identify **strong connections** with solid lines and **weaker connections** with dotted lines.

● **Use colors or labels** to categorize each relationship, such as "emotional support," "practical help," or "advice."

● **Draw a circle around any 'go-to' person or resource** they rely on most often.

Step 2: **Identify Gaps and Opportunities**

   o   Ask participants to reflect on any gaps in their support system and brainstorm ways to strengthen or expand these connections.

● **Points of Interest to Review in Map:**

● **Gaps**: Areas where there are fewer connections. These may be places where they feel unsupported.

- **Strengths**: Strong connections they can continue to nurture or ask for additional support from.

- **Opportunities**: People or resources they might reach out to more frequently or strengthen relationships with, such as joining a local support group or reaching out to a colleague.

  o Discuss gaps and potential areas for expanding support networks.

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Activity 2: Role Playing Scenarios

ACTIVITY 3: Role-Playing Scenarios

Short description of the theoretical context of the activity:

Role-playing allows caregivers to practice reaching out for help and setting boundaries within a supportive environment. This exercise helps caregivers become comfortable with asking for assistance and learn effective ways to manage caregiving responsibilities without feeling overwhelmed.

Aims and objectives of the activity:

- o Provide practice in reaching out for help or setting boundaries.

- o Increase caregivers' confidence in asking for support.

- o Identify common challenges caregivers face when reaching out and discuss strategies for overcoming these.

Materials Needed:

- o Role-play scripts with realistic caregiving scenarios

Duration of the activity: 15 minutes in total

Description of the process of the activity:

Step 1: **Introduce Role-Playing**

- o Explain that participants will practice reaching out for help or setting boundaries using provided scenarios.

Step 2: **Role-Play in Pairs or Small Groups**

> o   Divide participants into pairs or small groups. Distribute scripts featuring caregiving situations where a caregiver must ask for assistance or limit their caregiving load.

Step 3: **Reflect on Challenges and Insights**

> o   After the exercise, encourage participants to reflect on the experience. Ask: "What challenges did you encounter when asking for help?" "How did it feel to set a boundary?"

- **Scenario 1: Asking a Family Member for Help**

Role 1: Caregiver

You feel overwhelmed managing all your responsibilities and want to ask a family member to take on one regular caregiving task, such as grocery shopping for the person you're caring for.

- **Script Prompt**: "I've been finding it challenging to balance all the caregiving tasks lately. I could really use some help with grocery shopping. Would you be open to taking that on once a week?"

Role 2: Family Member

You're sympathetic but have a busy schedule yourself. You may be hesitant to take on a commitment but are open to helping with smaller tasks.

- **Script Prompt**: "I understand it's a lot. I'm quite busy myself, but maybe I could do it every other week? Or perhaps help with a smaller task?"

Reflection: After the role-play, discuss how it felt to request help and how participants could adjust their approach for different family dynamics.

- **Scenario 2: Setting Boundaries with a Friend**

Role 1: Caregiver

You want to set a boundary with a friend who often drops by unannounced when you're caregiving, which disrupts your routine. You appreciate their company but need advance notice.

- **Script Prompt**: "I love that you come by, but it can be tough when it's unexpected. Could you let me know in advance next time?"

Role 2: Friend

You're a supportive friend but may not have realized you were causing inconvenience. You're willing to adjust.

- **Script Prompt**: "I didn't realize it was disruptive. I can definitely text or call ahead next time."

Reflection: After the role-play, discuss how it felt to set boundaries, any discomfort in asking, and ideas for maintaining positive interactions.

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Activity 4: Action Planning, Sharing and Feedback

ACTIVITY 4: Action Planning, Sharing, and Feedback

Short description of the theoretical context of the activity:

Creating and sharing an action plan helps caregivers turn their intentions into achievable goals, strengthening their support systems and maintaining valuable connections. This activity encourages caregivers to set realistic steps for expanding their network, then share their goals to foster accountability and community support.

Aims and objectives of the activity:

- o Develop a personalized action plan for strengthening support networks.
- o Set realistic goals for seeking additional support and maintaining connections.
- o Facilitate a supportive environment for feedback and encouragement, building accountability within the group.

Materials Needed:

- o Action plan worksheet

- o Pens

- o Whiteboard and markers

Duration of the activity: 20 minutes in total

Description of the process of the activity:

Step 1: **Create an Action Plan**

Instruction: Guide participants in developing an action plan that includes specific, achievable steps to strengthen their support networks. Encourage them to think about practical actions, such as:

- **Reaching out** to a new group or community resource.
- **Asking for more help** from family members or friends.
- **Joining a caregiver support network** in their area or online.

Prompts for Goal Setting:

- "What one realistic goal could you set this month to expand or deepen your support network?"
- "Consider what types of support you're missing. Who in your network might help fill these roles, or where could you find additional assistance?"
- "How might you reach out to one new person or group this week or month?"

Step 2: **Reflect on the Action Planning Process**

Instruction: Encourage participants to reflect on their experience while setting goals, using guiding questions to explore any challenges or emotions they encountered.

Reflection Prompts:

- **For reaching out**: "What emotions came up when you thought about asking for help? Did it feel natural or difficult?"
- **For setting boundaries**: "How did it feel to establish boundaries in a caregiving

scenario? Did you feel hesitant or empowered?"

- **For sustaining these actions**: "What reminders or practices could you use to ensure you stay on track with these steps?"
- "How do you plan to check in with yourself to see if you're meeting your support goals?"

Step 3: **Sharing and Feedback**

Instruction: Invite participants to share one of their action steps with the group. Encourage others to provide supportive feedback, suggestions, or additional resources to help expand each other's networks.

Discussion Points:

- "Who would like to share a goal they're most excited about implementing?"
- "What resources or advice could be helpful for others as they work toward strengthening their support systems?"

Tips and recommendations:

o   Foster an open and non-judgmental environment to encourage sharing.

o   Encourage ongoing reflection and adjustment of support systems as needs change.