Social Support Shorts Episode 1: Introduction to Social Support

August: Hello everyone, and welcome to the first episode of Social Support Shorts. My name is August Kortzman. I'm a graduate student in clinical psychology at the University of Saskatchewan, supervised by Dr. Megan O'Connell.

Dr. O'Connell: And I'm Megan O'Connell. I'm a registered doctoral psychologist, which means I'm a clinical psychologist, and I'm also a professor at the University of Saskatchewan in the Department of Psychology and Health Studies, and it's my great pleasure to supervise August.

August: The Alzheimer's Society of Saskatchewan, Dr. O'Connell, and I have developed this series of podcasts to increase knowledge about social support as a caregiver.

Throughout this series, you will learn about social support and why it might be important for you, as well as some tips and tricks to help improve the support or you may or may not be receiving from people in your life.

Each one of these podcasts will be short, hence the name, Social Support Shorts. You can listen to them at your leisure, in your home, or while driving – wherever is comfortable for you.

This first one is going to be a little different than the rest of the podcasts. For the rest of the podcasts, it will be just me, August, and you, the podcast listener. But for this one, our extra-special guest star, Dr. O'Connell and I will talk about social support in a more general way. Now let's get into it.

Dr. O'Connell: August, can you share why social supports are so important? Why are we even discussing this?

August: Well, in a nutshell, social support – it's irreplaceable. It has been shown to be able to keep feelings like depression and anxiety at bay when we are experiencing a lot of stress in our life, when we have challenges in our life.

Dr. O'Connell: What about in the context of providing care or being a care partner for someone living with dementia? Why is accessing social support so important when you're providing care?

August: No, that's a great question. Those feelings, anxiety and depression, burden as well, they're very common for caregivers. I want to take a moment to point out that there are some beautiful things that can come out of caregiving.

You can feel like your relationship is becoming stronger with the person you're providing care for. You can also learn a lot about yourself too, and what you're capable of.

However, as you may have started to notice, your role as a caregiver starts to increase over time. You may start feeling a bit overwhelmed or exhausted.

Maybe you started out just having to give rides to appointments or help with grocery shopping. Now you're scheduling appointments, you're giving reminders about the appointments on top of managing finances and not just doing the shopping but creating grocery lists and helping to put away the groceries.

And with all of those increases in your role, you can start to feel a little bit overwhelmed – which is what we tend to call burnout. You can feel depressed, you can feel anxious. And you know what? That's okay. It tends to happen.

But that's when you can lean on social support to help manage those feelings and help make sure that they don't grow.

Dr. O'Connell: That's how important social support is. But for people who are caring for others living with dementia, their social support networks tend to decrease over time. It's ironic because that's a time when you really need them the most.

August, can you talk a little bit about the challenges care partners have with their social support networks?

August: Yeah, you're right. They actually do tend to decrease over time, and some of the listeners out there, they may be feeling that. There's many reasons, you know, sometimes it could be stigma; the people around you just don't know how to help you or how to react. And hopefully over time, you'll be able to reconnect with them, and that stigma will decrease through those increased connections.

Other times, there are people on the outside. If you imagine yourself in the middle of a circle, maybe a bullseye, there's people on the outside of the circle who want to support you. They just don't know what type of support you need or where to support you, when to support you.

They don't want to step on your toes. They think that you're doing a great job, and they don't want to feel, want you to feel, like you're doing a poor job, and they're just coming in and taking over.

On the other hand, you might be feeling like if you ask for support, you're being a burden. But the research shows that you aren't. Those people are just on the outside of that circle waiting for you to ask for support and invite them into the circle.

And then there are other times where you may have learned the hard way that people are not going to support you in the way that you want. And you've learned to be more independent. And you are just doing things on your own.

And in this case, I'm not doubting at all that you're highly capable. It's just, again, that over time, caregiving stress, caregiving expectations, they kind of grow. Your responsibilities will increase, and really leaning into social support, it can help you to manage that level of stress.

Now, I invite you to start taking this journey with me through these podcasts, where, first of all, we are going to start talking about different definitions. And that's just so we're speaking the same language.

Then our journey will progress further and start talking about different ways and different tips and tricks that you can improve your social support.

I'm really looking forward to taking this journey with you. Now, some of you may be note takers and I would encourage you to do so if you are.

As we go forward, there may be times where I invite you to take a moment and jot something down, or just to think about a situation or a scenario. Having a pen and paper may help with that.

And remember too, you can always pause any of these podcasts at any time in case something strikes you, and you want to take a little more time to reflect or write some notes.

Next episode, we will be defining social support and talking about some different types of support that may, that you may have experienced. Thanks for taking this journey with us. This is August.

Dr. O'Connell: This is Megan.

August: Signing off for the first episode of Social Support Shorts. Take care.