Social Support Shorts Episode 13: Coping Beyond Social Support

Hi everyone, this is August again with another episode of Social Support Shorts. We're near the end of our journey together, sadly.

Last time we talked about the barriers to seeking help and that's really the culmination of our work together.

We've discussed social support in general, how it can change with the caregiving role, how to bring that support back to you, things that might get in the way, and strategies to get past such barriers. There's really one more important thing I'd like to leave you with as we start to wrap up our time together.

Now, we talked about social support a lot, *a lot*, through this series. And the reason of course, being that it is an often easily accessible means of coping with the stress and complex emotions that can come from caregiving. And feeling very strong positive and negative emotions is very common.

I want to highlight that point. Happiness, satisfaction with time spent with the person you're providing care for, the feeling of giving back perhaps – all common positive feelings and experiences that come with caregiving.

But over time, you may also feel doubt about your abilities, which most likely is completely unfounded, but it also happens to be frequently felt among caregivers, believe it or not.

Guilt, frustration, resentment can follow, which again, very, very common. Is any of this hitting home for anyone? Yeah, I imagine that it does for at least some, if not most of you.

And social support, especially if you have a Listener in your circle, is a coping strategy, that can help with such feelings.

But there are many other strategies that may help you to work your way through stressful or emotional times as well – too many for us to list in a single podcast.

So, what we have done is we have included some great coping resources on our website, right under this podcast. They highlight adaptive coping strategies that may really help you to further build your resilience as you continue your journey, and they may actually help in other aspects of your life too.

You're not just a caregiver; you have other roles. And I know these coping strategies have certainly helped me in many aspects of my life. I hope they will in your life too, friends.

So please, please check the resources out. Some are websites that offer many different tips, tricks, and tools. Some are a little text-heavy, and the reason for that is they also give you a little background on the tool, and how it may help you when you're feeling stressed.

Now, some of you may not want all that extra information, so we also have links to sites or downloadable sheets that highlight one tool.

One example is the sheet on the five, four, three, two, one method. It's a quick way to engage all of your senses and bring your focus to the here and now, to ground you here, in the present.

Another offers a box-breathing video with explanations on how to do the breathing exercise, which has been shown to help calm the nervous system and bring you back towards your centre.

The great thing is the exercise can be done anywhere and anytime you need it – it's relatively discreet. Sometimes we just need to sneak in a little self-care to help manage a stressful situation that's happening in front of us.

If you can't get out to walk in nature, for example, which has been shown to be really, really soothing, it's a well-supported coping strategy, there is a nature video you can pull up whenever you need it on your computer or your phone as well.

The reason we are giving you a few options is that some may click with you, and others may not. There are two things that I would invite you to do with these tools.

The first is be open to trying as many as you can. It would be great for you to develop a coping toolbox filled with different techniques because one may work one time, but not another, and vice versa.

So, after trying all the techniques, you do find some that you want to put in your back pocket, then you'll have a few different techniques to use during certain times of stress.

And second, it is so, so important to practice these tools even when you're not stressed, and here's why. Have you ever tried to think clearly while you're highly stressed? I have, and every time the stress wins.

My point here is that we need to practice these coping techniques when we aren't stressed, so they become sort of a muscle memory. Then, in moments of stress when we need an exercise, we can call on it.

We may need to start the exercise with intent, but after that, because of our practice, it just flows. And we can just focus on bringing that level of stress down, soothing ourselves, bringing us back to the middle. So yes, please, please check out the tools.

Now, beyond these tools, there's kind of these like lifestyle factors that can help us with our stress, and I'd be remiss, not to mention them. So, I'll do so quickly.

First is exercise, any type of exercise. For me, I like to swim; I'm a water baby – grew up on a lake. Swimming is a low impact, full body workout that goes at your own pace, and the repetitive motions are really meditative because you eventually go into a kind of an auto drive.

Some of my family members really enjoy dancing, I don't. They do it on Friday nights. They find different clubs and groups to join to go dancing, and that is a wonderful way to exercise.

It also gives you something that you can look forward to throughout the week because it's been shown that if you have any events on your calendar that you're anticipating and looking forward to, it can actually improve your mood – reduce your stress.

But the main point here with exercise is to get your body moving, and most importantly, make sure it's an activity you enjoy. If you don't like running, don't start running. If you'd rather walk, then walk.

Because we don't want these lifestyle factors to be something that you don't look forward to and will put off. And hey, for all of us, that's human nature. I do it all the time when I don't want to do something, but we want this to be something that's beneficial for you. So, make sure it's something you enjoy.

Now, diet is important too. Yes, enjoying a little sweet or salty treat here or there can help relieve stress in the moment, but following a healthy diet, for example the Mediterranean diet, can significantly impact your mood and your reaction to stress. It can also be heart and brain-healthy, so win, win, win.

Sleep is so, so important as well. If you have trouble with sleep, please talk to a health professional. Poor sleep has an impact on so many different parts of our life.

Our mood, our reaction to stress, our cognitive abilities, that improving your sleep can have a positive domino effect in your life.

And those are just some lifestyle suggestions to help you cope with the stress that you may experience.

If you want a great online resource, your local Alzheimer's Society may have some great resources, for sure. But another wonderful website is Dementia Wellness Canada. I'll pause here for a second so that you can grab a pen and paper to write down the website.

Alternatively, there's also a link to their website on our page. So, we will take a second now. You can also press pause.

All right. Welcome back. So, Dementia Wellness Canada. The website is dementiawellness.com. That's D-E-M-E-N-T-I-A-W-E-L-L-N-E-S-S dot com, C-O-M.

All right, friends. I'm just taking a moment to reflect. This is our last time together, at least in this series of Social Support Shorts, and I'm feeling it right now. I'm in my feels.

I'd really like to thank you for all the trust and faith you've put in me as we've taken this journey. I hope it's been beneficial for you. This has been a wonderful experience for me, and I'm feeling a little kind of sadness, it's a little bittersweet that this may be the last time we spend some time together, at least for a while.

I wish for you nothing but the best. I hope all of this has been beneficial, at least parts of it, you know, as I said before have a toolbox.

And I thank you so much from the bottom of my heart. For your time and energy – it's appreciated. Alright. This is August, signing off.