



Anxiety Relief: A Practical Guide for Caregivers

 **Givers**

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Anxiety is a learned response to overwhelming situations. And any learned response can be unlearned or relearned.

Caregiving has all the features of a chronic stress experience. It creates physical and psychological strain over extended periods of time, involves high levels of unpredictability and uncontrollability, creates secondary stress in other areas of life like work & family relationships, and frequently requires high vigilance.

Use this guide as a resource to help you better manage your anxiety and ensure that you and your loved one are taken care of.

Short-term anxiety relief

1 Write down your thoughts

Research shows that journaling is an effective way for managing stress, reducing anxiety, increasing productivity. Set aside a few minutes each day to write down your thoughts & feelings.

2 List your controllables

Make a list of what you can & can't control. Acknowledging and accepting what you can't control helps you shift your energy towards what you can and take steps to reduce stress.

3 Get back to the basics

Good quality sleep helps regulate emotions & reduce anxiety. One thing you can do is to create a consistent bedtime routine—a series of relaxing activities telling your body that it's time to wind down.

4 Connect with loved ones

Sharing your thoughts and feelings with friends or family can help you feel less alone and more understood. Tell them how you feel without minimizing or exaggerating your experience, and share specific ways in which they can support you.

Activity

Catastrophizing is a cognitive distortion that can occur when stressed or anxious. It involves exaggerating the problem or assuming the worst possible outcome to be true. By questioning our thoughts and assumptions, we can learn to challenge our catastrophic thoughts and replace them with more balanced, realistic ones.

What are you worried about?

How likely is it that your worry will come true?

Give examples of past experiences or other evidence to support your answer.

If your worry does come true, what's the worst that could happen?

If your worry does come true, what's most likely to happen?

If your worry comes true, what are the chances you'll be okay...

In one week? ____%

In one month? ____%

In one year? ____%



Longer-term relief

1 Create healthier boundaries

Creating healthier boundaries in your life can help relieve anxiety by providing a sense of control and reducing feelings of overwhelm. Cerebral Therapist Jess Quinlan says, "the first step is mattering—we have to believe that we matter. **As a caregiver you matter no less than the person you care for**; there's just a difference in independence. You may be able to do activities of daily living more independently, but your differences in mattering are no different. When you get to a place of mattering, then you're able to set up a boundary." This can involve learning to say "no" when you need to, communicating your needs and limits clearly, and making time for self-care and activities that bring you joy.

2 Get involved in community

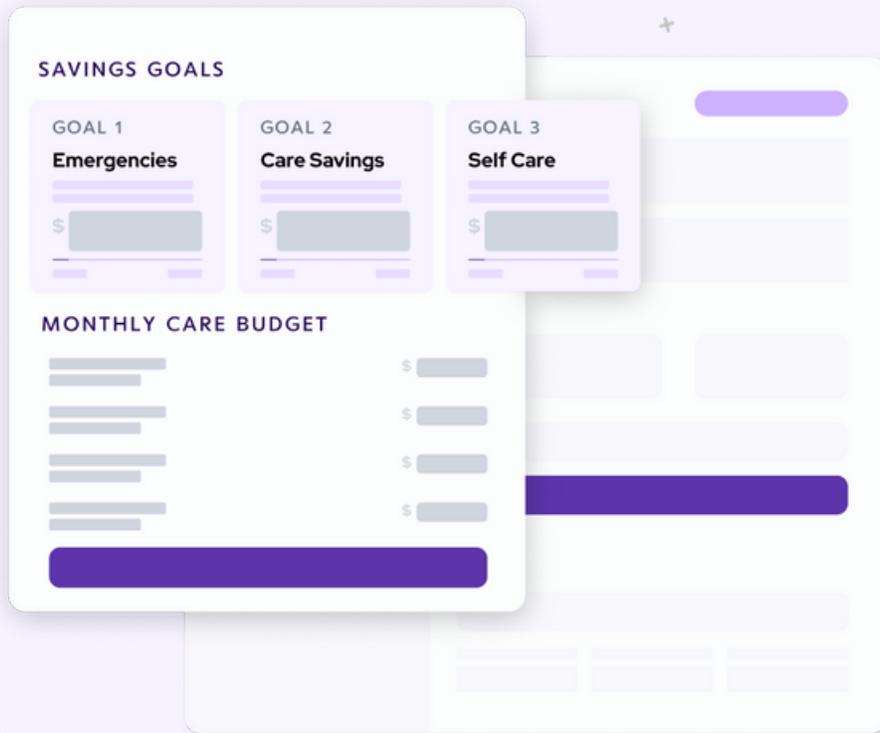
Your life will improve when your relationships do. Find a group (religious, counseling, hobby, etc.) for regular accountability & community. Some ways to find community include joining caregiver support groups, reaching out to local organizations that support caregivers, attending events or workshops related to caregiving, and connecting online through social media or forums. Then, show up for them—and for yourself.

3 Commit to a healthy lifestyle

Step one for establishing healthy habits is to identify specific, measurable, & realistic goals. Reflect on your current lifestyle and consider areas where you could make positive changes. From there, set goals that align with your values and priorities, and create a plan for how to achieve them. Start small and be patient with yourself—creating lasting change takes time.

4 Get professional help

Professional help can be extremely beneficial for a caregiver who is struggling with anxiety. A therapist can provide a safe and non-judgmental space to explore and process emotions related to caregiving, as well as teach coping skills and stress-management techniques. Additionally, a therapist can help caregivers set boundaries, develop self-care strategies, and identify and address any underlying mental health concerns.



Take back control of your finances.

Developing a Givers Plan can help you feel empowered over your financial situation—helping your anxiety to go down and your motivation to increase.

