

The Caregiver's Companion
to Peace and Positives:

Finding the positives
along your journey



“I learned to be grateful for each precious day we have. I learned to enjoy the simple things in life—like the first time my husband was able to go out without wearing a mask or the day his port was removed. What matters is concentrating on positive thoughts that will help your loved one get better.” — **Jody, caregiver**

Creating **positive** moments

Caregiving is a journey, and like any journey, it can be demanding and full of unexpected twists and turns.

But that doesn't mean you can't experience positive things along the way. In fact, many caregivers say that they found positive elements to their journey, such as moments of love or gratitude that helped them at just the right time. Some caregivers have even experienced profound changes in life philosophy or faith.



Mitch, caregiver

The purpose of *The Caregiver's Companion to Peace and Positives* is to help you find positives along the caregiving journey. In this Chapter:

Finding Peace

- Remembering your identity
 - Search for meaning
-

Finding Joy and Beauty

- Create positive memories
-

Exploring Spirituality

- Find what works for you
-

Expressing Gratitude

- Ways to give back
- Humor, smiles and laughter

How are you doing **right now**?

Before you read on, take a minute to answer a few questions about how you are doing in these areas:

Have you discovered a strength you didn't know you had?..... Yes No

Are you able find small things for which you are grateful?..... Yes No

Are you able to find moments of joy and beauty in your life?..... Yes No

Do you feel you feel closer to your loved one, or to others?..... Yes No

Are you still able to find something to make you smile each day?..... Yes No

If you've checked "No" more times than "Yes"—you may benefit from trying the suggestions in this chapter to help you find positive things during your caregiving journey.



Rosemarie, caregiver with her husband Ed

Finding **peace** through acceptance

One key to finding peace with all the changes in your life is to first acknowledge them. You may need to yell, cry, laugh, or express in other ways your fear, anger, frustration, and other emotions. Acknowledging that your life has changed, in ways that you wish it hadn't, is the first step towards acceptance. Not recognizing the changes in your life allows the strong feelings about those changes to hang over you like a dark cloud.

Letting go of negative feelings about those changes can help you be a more effective caregiver.

Remember that acceptance does not mean giving up hope. Acceptance will actually help you to move forward, which can't happen if you continue to go around in circles wishing things were different.

Acceptance can be as simple as saying to yourself, "Okay, this is my life at this moment. Now, what am I going to do about it? How can I make the best of it?"

Let go of negative feelings.

Write them down
in your journal.



Remembering your identity

The job of a caregiver can seem all consuming. It is perhaps your biggest role right now, and it may even seem like it has defined you. It is part of you, but it is not all of you. It's important to keep in touch with aspects of your own identity. Here are four easy ways to do that:

- 1 Maintain activities** that mean the most to you—for example, something related to your career, your hobbies, your friends
- 2 Spend some time** going through old photos
- 3 Look through old letters,** cards or emails
- 4 Share a fond memory** with a friend. Maybe it's a story from your childhood or a special family vacation



Keith, caregiver with his family

Search for meaning

Making sense of the caregiving experience and finding meaning is a very personal journey.

Know that it's normal to mourn the things in your life that have changed, such as your own career, your health, your finances, your life together with your loved one. Doing so will allow you to begin to realize that there may be things you have gained, perhaps things that are surprising. Such as, learning that you are stronger than you thought. Or, you feel closer to your loved one, or to others. Or you may feel that you are making different choices in your life—living more simply or spending more time with your family.

Here are some ways to explore meaning:

- Write your thoughts and feelings in your journal. First focus on your feelings and then begin to look for positives or meaningful changes that have occurred.
- If you have a faith or spiritual counselor, talk to your pastor, clergy, rabbi, or other spiritual leader
- Talk over your feelings with a counselor, social worker, or psychologist
- Talk with others who have gone through similar experiences
- Read a book that focuses on these issues
- Teach others about what you've learned through your experience
- Refer to resources on bethematch.org/companion

Find moments of **joy and beauty**



Kate, caregiver with her mom

Look for moments of joy and beauty in your life. They are there, if you keep your eyes and ears open. They can spring up in unexpected places—an especially kind nurse who goes out of her way to help or a special moment with your loved one who expresses his or her love for you.

“The most beautiful moment I shared with my mom was watching one of the nurse’s aides shave her head during chemo. With each cut of hair our smiles and tears and mom herself became more and more beautiful. The love in that room that day was beyond measure and I have never been prouder to be my mother’s daughter.”
—Kate, caregiver

Be ready to grab those moments and hang on to them. Relish them, write them down, put them in your memory, so that you can bring them out again and again, especially when you are feeling down or discouraged. You might write these things in your wellness journal so that you can look back at them any time.

Create positive moments and memories

Because of the many changes that come with your caregiving role, some of the family activities you once did may no longer be possible, at least temporarily. However, it is still possible to find new activities and make new memories together.

Here are some things to try:

- Start a family **game night**
- **Read a story** to a child
- Purchase a webcam or **exchange photos**, so you can still see family and friends who are far away
- Take a **picnic lunch** to a park or picnic in your backyard
- Celebrate a **small accomplishment** or **milestone** with a fancy cake

Caregivers have said that starting a new tradition was very beneficial, such as:

After everyone sits down at the table for dinner, and before eating, each person says what was the best thing that happened to him/her that day, no matter how small. It’s amazing how realizing there were many positive moments in the day and sharing them with others can make everyone feel better!



Jeanette (right), caregiver to husband Everett, pictured with her family

Spirituality

Questions about the meaning of life and death may come up as you travel down the caregiver path. Spirituality is very personal and means different things to different people. For some people, feeling close to a higher power is an incredible source of strength and support.

Try some of these ways to explore and add something spiritual to your daily life:

- Read an **inspiring book**
- Listen to **spiritual music**
- Keep an uplifting or **meaningful quote** handy
- **Pray or meditate**
- **Talk with a member of your faith community** or someone else with a similar spiritual nature
- **Visit a place of worship** or a special place of contemplation

Reflection

Take time to reflect back on how far you have come. It may feel bad now, but was there a time in the past that was worse? You have made it through some tough times and you can be proud of that. So often we quickly forget how we got through those other difficult times, and don't realize how far we have really come.



“I relied a lot on my faith while caregiving and said many daily prayers.” — **Jody, caregiver**

Ways you can express your gratitude

Even in the most challenging times, it is possible to find things for which we are grateful. Some caregivers have said they were grateful that the recovery process has gone well, that the survivor is alive, that they have received wonderful support from others, and that they have experienced positive moments along the way.

Keep a gratitude diary

Some people keep a “gratitude diary” and have found that it shifts their mindset from taking things for granted or feeling like a victim, to feeling empowered and glad.

To start, you simply take a moment to write down the things in your life or things that happened during the day for which you are grateful. There is a space to do this in your wellness journal.

These can include everyday things that we all tend to take for granted (for example, enjoying the sunshine, having a hot shower, sleeping in a comfortable bed) as well as things we can be grateful for (a good test result, progress in recovery).

If you make a commitment to yourself to write at least three things down for which you are grateful or thankful on that day, you will find:

- On the first day it may be hard to come up with things
- On the second day it will be easier
- Soon, you will begin to recognize things to be grateful for as they happen

With a gratitude diary, you may experience an overall shift to more positive well-being. And since it can't hurt, it might be worth a try!

When you're ready, consider helping others who are in your shoes

Many caregivers have expressed a desire to help others who find themselves in similar situations. They feel that giving back may be a way to create something meaningful and positive from something very challenging.



Terry & Deb, caregivers

Ways to give back:

- **Participate in a support group** or online discussion and share your experiences with others. You might consider starting one of these yourself.
- **Share your story**, whether one-on-one with others or through social media like Facebook or blogs. Your experience can touch other people's lives in meaningful ways. You are in a unique position to provide hope and motivation to others.
- **Get involved with a national or local organization.** You could attend a cancer survivorship conference and make sure caregiver and other issues are discussed and heard.

(Modified from the NCI publication, When Someone You Love has Advanced Cancer: Support for Caregivers)



Brian, caregiver with his daughters

“It was a simple fact that, no matter what kind of day I had at the hospital, when I would see my daughters they would make me smile and laugh and THAT was extremely important. Even on the darkest days, they brought me a little sunshine.” — **Brian, caregiver**

Humor, smiles and laughter

It can be hard to find humor in difficult circumstances. To laugh can feel strange, as if you are not taking the situation seriously. Humor is not only okay, it is good for you. Laughing releases hormones (called endorphins) in your body that may actually help you stay healthier.

Laughing does not mean that you are making light of the situation, it means that you are making the best of it. If you feel guilty for laughing, think of it as your way of not letting the cancer or illness get the better of you!

“I made it a point to appreciate the little things in life, like a beautiful day, a time alone to read, a small sign that our daughter was doing better that day and finally, making people laugh. I did my best to keep my sense of humor during the entire treatment.”

— **Pete, caregiver**

Chapter Recap:

- *Choose a way to find peace that helps you feel good about yourself*
- *Remember to hold onto moments of joy and love, and keep them in your memory*
- *Take time to feel and show gratitude to yourself and others during difficult times*

Visit **BeTheMatch.org/companion** for a list of resources to help you find positives along your caregiving journey

