

123

SESAME STREET

Taking Care of Us

A guide to help military caregiving families grow in emotional well-being



SESAME WORKSHOP

POWERED BY



WOUNDED WARRIOR PROJECT

Hugs & Hope: Emotional Wellness for Caregivers



Caring for an injured loved one comes with many challenges. And learning to balance the needs of your loved one, your children, and yourself is no small feat. Remember that you are not alone and there are things you and your family can do—and are already doing!—to manage the ups and downs of your caregiving journey. This guide offers simple ideas your whole family can use. You'll find tips and strategies, along with activities for children and grown-ups, all designed to boost your family's emotional well-being.

Caring, Connected, Compassionate

Striving to be healthy in mind, body, and heart can help your family thrive, even in difficult circumstances. There are many ways to grow in emotional well-being, and in this guide we'll focus on four key areas, which with intentionality and persistence, can lead to meaningful outcomes for your family.

Emotional awareness

is the ability to notice, label, and regulate a range of feelings. It is also being aware of how others feel.

Social connections

are the people who support your family.

Mind-body connection

is the impact the brain and body have on each other.

Compassionate mindset

is the love and kindness given to ourselves and others, even in difficult moments.

Heartfelt Hide and Seek: Discovering Emotions

When your family faces changes together, you might notice many emotions and feelings, such as sadness, frustration, happiness, and surprise, just to name a few! Emotions are body sensations, behaviors, and facial expressions. Feelings are emotions described with words, and being able to notice, identify, label, and use strategies to help regulate them can support emotional well-being. These activities can help you practice.



I Notice, I Feel, I Can

◆ Step 1. I notice:

Pause to notice how your body feels.

◆ Step 2. I feel:

Use a “feelings word” to name the emotion.

◆ Step 3. I can:

Choose something that might help you manage the feeling, like a hug, a deep breath, or a dance party.

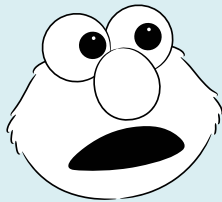
Me too!

Help children understand that grown-ups need to have different ways to “let out” big feelings in ways that are “just right” for them, too. Share with your child all the ways you “let it out.” Your example is important!

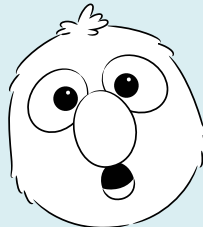
Feelings Bingo

Look at the nine faces below. Take turns choosing an emotion to act out with your own face and body, while the other person tries to guess. Invite the person not acting to guess the emotion being acted out. If the person guesses right, place a slip of paper or a token over that face. Play until you cover all the faces. Kids can color in each feeling face as well.

Remember, there are many ways to express the same emotion; if your child says that "ecstatic" looks like "thrilled," respond with curiosity. Say, "Can you show me what you mean?"



disappointed



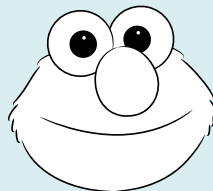
surprised



furious



frustrated



content



miserable



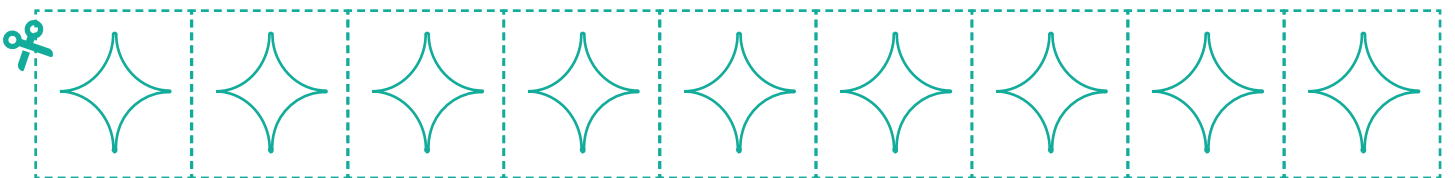
thrilled



ecstatic



happy



Circle of Care: Building Bridges of Connection

Maintaining friendships and strong family relationships is important for you and your children, especially when things get tough. Children benefit from having more than one caring adult to talk to about their feelings and help handle life's ups and downs. And when you can rely on others for encouragement, you'll be better equipped to keep taking the right steps for you and your family.



It may be hard to know how to find other caregiving families like yours. Here are key words to search for to help you find those connections:

Wounded Warrior Project	Sesame Workshop Caregiving
Folds of Honor	Bob Woodruff Foundation
Wounded Warriors Family Support	Elizabeth Dole Foundation
Parenting for Veterans	Camp Corral
Military OneSource	National Military Family Association

ABCDE's of Problem Solving:

Every family faces challenges from time to time. And caregiving responsibilities might make those problems seem even bigger. But with a little creativity and collaboration, your family can come up with solutions that help everyone feel more confident and connected.

Talk through each step of the ABCDE's of problem solving, and invite children to help along the way. Remember, sometimes problem solving takes time. That's okay; it gives everyone more time to learn!

Ask

When your child has a problem, ask what the problem is. Sometimes it takes a while to figure out the problem hiding in all the feelings.

Brainstorm

Think of all of the ways—serious or silly!—the problem could be solved.

Choose

a solution that might work.

Do

Try out the solution. If it doesn't work, try again or choose a new solution.

Evaluate

Reflect on what worked and what you learned.

Happy Hearts, Healthy Habits: The Mind-Body Connection

Our bodies and minds are connected. Establishing and maintaining healthy habits can have positive effects on your family's physical and mental health and help you feel more united. We can take care of our bodies and our brains by eating healthy food, like fruits and vegetables. The right amount of sleep and rest gives us energy and effects our feelings. Movement and playtime give us space to let go of built-up energy and stress. If these areas are out of sync because of caretaking, try to focus on one small change (such as drinking a glass of water in the morning) at a time. Use a calendar to track your new habit. When you feel consistent, add one more small change.

As a caregiver it is easy to overlook your own needs. It can seem unattainable to add care for yourself, but start small: enjoy five minutes of quiet time in the morning, have some "screen-free" time each day, call a friend, or spend some time outside.

Body Map

The sensations we feel in our bodies can be clues to different emotions we might experience without even realizing it. For example, frustration can look like furrowed eyebrows or hunched shoulders. Use this activity to practice mind-body awareness.

First, check in with how your bodies are feeling right now. Take a deep breath in and out, and close your eyes. Start with your feet and move up. Notice how each body part feels (tight, relaxed, warm, cold, etc.). Share what you each feel.

Then, choose a feeling word from the feeling list and pair it with a body part. Wonder aloud: How could we express this feeling with this body part? If you can, act out your ideas.



Self-Compassion in Daily Moments

Mindset is how we see ourselves and the world around us. As a caregiver, you may experience difficult moments, and how you respond to those moments can have a real effect on your well-being. “Trying on” the five parts of a **compassionate mindset** will help you and your family develop inner strengths.

1. **Self-compassion** is learning to accept ourselves and treat ourselves kindly when we make mistakes. *“Mistakes are how my brain learns and grows. This is just one try at learning.”*
2. **Self-confidence** is knowing you are special and there’s no one else like you! *“I love you just the way you are.”*
3. **Cultivating hope** is having goals that help your family learn to make plans and believe in yourselves. *“Our goal for today is to get to practice on time, we can do it if everyone puts their gear and water bottles by the door.”*
4. Your family can develop a sense of **wonder and joy** by exploring the world around you. *“Wow. Look how blue the sky is today. It’s so beautiful. What colors do you see?”*
5. **Gratitude** is when we take the time to feel happy and thankful about a person, place, or thing. *“Thank you for coloring pictures with me today. I love to spend time with you.”*

Remember to speak kindly with yourself, too. When you feel a critical mindset arising, close your eyes, take a few slow deep breaths, and say, “I’m a parent who keeps trying.”

The “Why I’m Great” Game

Share with your child qualities that make them great, such as being a good listener, adventurous on the playground, or not giving up. And remind them that they’re special and loved all the time.

- [Your Child’s Name] is great at...
- [Your Child’s Name] is a good friend because...
- [Your Child’s Name] is helpful because...
- [Your Child’s Name] is special because...
- [Your Child’s Name] is loved just for who they are.

When you’re done, practice saying these out loud every day—as you buckle your child into a car seat, help them get dressed, or tuck them into bed.





Glimmers of Joy

Your family is so special. Together you've faced big changes and challenges. And each new day presents an opportunity for you to celebrate your accomplishments, acknowledge your strengths, and recommit to supporting one another.

Remember that when each member of your family is well, your whole family shines even brighter. Look for the "glimmers" during your day—those tiny moments of turning toward each other with connection, safety, and love—to start again, whenever you need to. Color this page together.