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A MARATHON, NOT A SPRINT

A Social Worker Shares Her Top Tips for Caregivers

Sarasota Sarasota



By Shelby Schwartz • Updated 1/19/2020 at 8:47pm



Cheryl Hamlin

IMAGE: [GENE POLLUX](#)

Fasten your seatbelt, and in the case of an emergency, put your oxygen mask on before helping others.

These are the first rules before a flight takes off and an analogy, Cheryl Hamlin, visiting instructor of social work at [USF Sarasota-Manatee](#), uses when emphasizing the importance of caregivers making time for themselves. The first step is to put on the mask, she says, and the second is to help those around you, a fundamental rule for caregivers who forget to address their personal needs and responsibilities.

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Hamlin is a licensed clinical social worker, certified dementia practitioner and an approved clinical supervisor. For more than 30 years, she has focused on aiding those with cognitive issues, including Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia, and worked with caregivers whose loved ones face those challenges.

First rule: Don't feel guilty. "Give yourself permission to take care of yourself," Hamlin says.

And then try a support group. It's liberating to know that there are choices about how to care for someone and that nobody is ever alone. The Sarasota community has many support programs in place. Some include Jewish Family and Children's Services and the Neuro Challenge Foundation for Parkinson's. "Almost everyone knows somebody else who is experiencing something similar," Hamlin says.

Hamlin also urges caregivers to recognize that "the caregiving journey is a marathon, not a sprint." Caregiving is enormously challenging, especially if you're working. Reflecting on emotions, recognizing the first signs of depression, finding support and having an understanding employer can make all the difference.

Hamlin says former First Lady Rosalynn Carter once said, "There are four kinds of people in the world: those who have been caregivers, those who are currently caregivers, those who will be caregivers, and those who will need caregivers." Finding balance is key, no matter which of "the four kinds of people" you are. Make sure there is a healthy balance between your needs and caregiving responsibilities—and always remember to put your oxygen mask on first.

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