

# **Finding Mental Strength: Coping Strategies and Survivor's Guilt**

**A Conversation on  
Building Resilience in  
Patients and Caregivers**

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# What is resilience?



# The ability to bounce back



# Getting "unstuck"



# A few keys to building resilience:

- Everything I talk about today can be applied to patient or caregivers
- Do what you can to eliminate uncertainty
- Stay flexible
- Be self-compassionate and non-judgmental
- Take care of yourself
- Seek support
- Cultivate a sense of gratitude
- Practice resilience in "smaller" situations



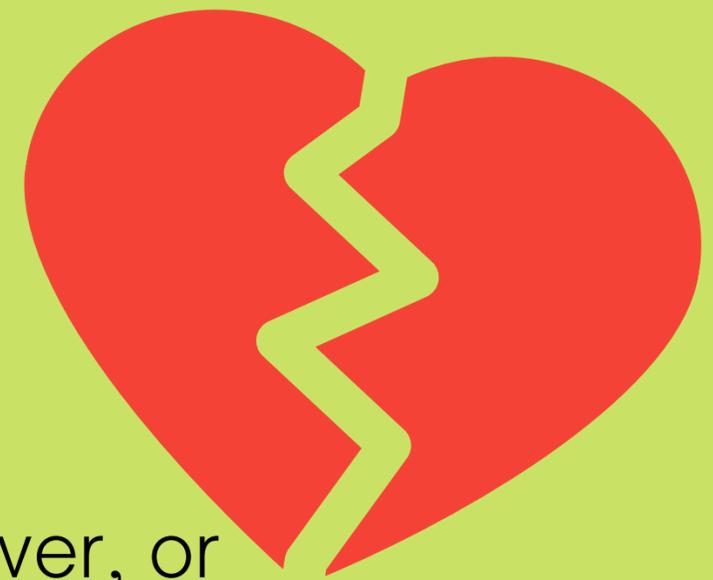
# Working Through the Overwhelm of Everyday Life

- Journaling
- Meditation
- Setting gentle boundaries: Asking for space, asking for what you need
- Self-compassion while accepting your limitations
- Asking for help





# Feelings of Guilt: Define



- Can be felt by the person living with the illness or the caregiver, or both
- The person living with illness may feel guilt that they are dependent on the caregiver
- Can include survivor's guilt that is a sense of guilt one might experience when they survive while someone else does not
- Guilt takes up a great deal of emotional energy
- Guilt is an emotion, emotions are neutral, avoid labeling as "good" or "bad"
- Important step is to reflect on feelings, acknowledge and learn from them, and try to move forward



# Feelings of Guilt: Identify

- Feeling guilty for being healthy yourself
- Feeling like you didn't and/or aren't providing good enough care
- Feeling guilty about moving on with your life
- Feeling bad for doing something good for yourself
- Unrealistic expectations about what you can do in a situation



# Feelings of Guilt: Understand

- Some level of guilt is reasonable
- When guilt becomes a trap it's not helpful
- Acknowledge what you're feeling
- Remember you are not alone, the Rolfe support community
- Try not to isolate yourself
- Be compassionate to yourself: Treat yourself like you would a loved one in the same situation



# Feelings of Guilt: Manage

- If you feel stuck in a pattern of guilt, seek help
- Remember grief recovery is not linear and differs for everyone
- Allow yourself to laugh, to be happy
- Allow yourself to grieve while also allowing yourself to embrace something positive, even in small ways
- Ask for help: Be specific about what you need
- Try reaching out to others, be specific when you ask what they need



*Allow the trials of your life to  
become seeds of compassion.*

*Then plant those seeds in  
other people's lives.*

~Journal entry: August 13, 2011

# The Importance of Self-Care

- Your physical and psychological health are essential and both impact your ability to give of yourself to others
- Self-care is never selfish, it's often the path to improved wellness
- Self-care habits (eating nutritious foods, adequate sleep, hydration, physical activity) can contribute to your stamina and mental strength
- A positive attitude is fostered in the midst of self-care as you refuel, recharge, and refill your own cup
- Meditation, yoga, gentle stretching, walking outdoors can all decrease anxiety and stress levels: Do what makes you feel better
- Breathwork: deep, mindful breathing can be done anywhere and anytime
- Situation may not change at all, but your response changes



# Closing Thoughts:

- Without resilience we tend to find ourselves feeling like a "failure" or as if we should give up
- Without resilience we tend to get stuck in the difficulties, unable to move forward
- Self-care, honest reflection, and self-compassion are a few keys to resilience
- Building resilience on a daily basis in smaller situations can increase our mental strength for when larger crises arise



Questions?

