

caring without losing yourself

caring for someone through a long illness asks everything: your time, your sleep, your body, your heart. it is grief and labour at once, often for months or years, and it can quietly erode the person you were before. you matter in this too. looking after yourself is not a betrayal of them; it is part of how you keep being able to care for them at all.

you cannot pour from empty. tending to your own needs is not selfish, it is what makes the caring sustainable.

THE PARTICULAR WEIGHT OF CAREGIVING

a tiredness that sleep does not fix, the body and spirit both worn down.

the loss of your own life running quietly in the background, work, friendships, plans set aside.

guilt in every direction, for resting, for resenting it, for not doing more.

isolation, as the world carries on and few people truly understand what your days hold.

GENTLE WAYS TO KEEP YOURSELF

rest without earning it. you do not have to deserve a break. rest when you can, eat something, sit down, not as a reward, but as fuel.

let others carry some of it. you do not have to be the only one who knows, or who does. tell someone how tired you are, and ask for the practical help people often want to give but do not know how to offer.

keep one thread of your own life. a walk, a friend, ten minutes with a book, one small thing that is still yours. it is not abandonment; it is what keeps you a whole person.

accept help in specifics. “could you bring a meal on tuesday” or “could you sit with them for an hour” is easier for people to say yes to than “let me know if you need anything.”

respite is allowed. hospices and carer organisations offer respite care so you can rest. needing it does not mean you are failing them. it means you are human.

let every feeling have room. love and resentment, devotion and exhaustion can share the same day. none of it makes you a bad carer. it makes you a real one.

IF THE DAYS FEEL UNBEARABLE

if you are struggling to carry on, please reach out. you should not have to hold this alone.

SADAG (South African Depression and Anxiety Group): 0800 567 567

Lifeline South Africa: 0861 322 322

looking after yourself is part of looking after them.

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