

BOOMERS, ELDERS & MORE

A Monthly Elder Care Newsletter of the Vanderbilt Child & Family Center



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Resolve to Alleviate Your Fears in the New Year

If you find yourself worrying over what might come, consider these steps

by Amy Florian

When you were young, New Year's resolutions may have been about dieting, finding a new job or traveling more. But now, as you deal with the vast emotional landscape faced by every aging boomer and Gen Xer, your challenges, worries and fears have changed: Perhaps you or your spouse are dealing with a serious diagnosis.

Maybe you are single again and making financial decisions on your own for the first time or figuring out how to be safe when you live by yourself. You worry your money will disappear and imagine yourself homeless.



If you have long given up on the usefulness of New Year's resolutions, consider using the start of the new year as an excuse to take an honest look at your fears (even the irrational ones) and come up with a logical plan to manage them.

Take Stock of Your Fears

Resolving fears requires recognizing and naming them. So your first step is to take inventory and list them. Think about all the times when you feel a knot in the pit of your stomach or when you can't shut your brain off to go to sleep or when you get sweaty palms and a dry mouth. What is worrying you then? What are you afraid of?

Also ask yourself questions such as: What is the worst thing I can imagine happening to me? What could happen that may not be the worst, but I certainly wouldn't like it?

Research studies show that when we write down or write about our fears, it takes away some of their power. Therefore, even the simple act of writing your fears down so you can look at them more objectively can be helpful. As you think of things that generate fear or worry, write them down on the left side of a paper. Some of them may be substantial, such as fear of not being able to stay in your own home. Others may be smaller. Write them all down anyway, no matter how long the list gets.

Brainstorm Your Options

Now, choose one fear at a time, and contemplate what things might help, no matter how unconventional they might seem.

For instance, if the fear is being unsafe now that you live alone, you might choose to:

- Install a home alarm and have outside lights on motion sensors
- Always lock doors, even when you're home
- Ensure that windows are secure and that sliding doors have security bars
- To combat the stillness in which you hear every creak and groan of the house, turn on a TV quietly so you hear a voice, or play music that provides background and relaxes you at the same time
- Keep pepper spray on your nightstand and have another on your keychain to carry with you
- Perhaps take a self-defense class at a local community college or park district
- Register for an option such as Lifeline, so you have immediate help in case of an emergency
- Start planning now for where you may eventually move, such as a senior living community where there are built-in activities, safe environs and interesting people to meet

If the fear is running out of money, you could:

- Meet with a financial adviser to discuss investments, reserves and possibilities
- Ensure that you have an emergency fund of at least three to six months of living expenses
- Develop a budget or spending plan by keeping a written log of all income and expenses, no matter how small, so you know what you're spending vs. what is coming in and then cut back on nonessential expenses wherever you can to ensure you can still be putting money into savings
- Make sure you're taking advantage of discounts wherever you shop, eat, or travel and educate yourself on how to get your maximum Social Security benefits

Or perhaps your biggest fear is isolation or loneliness and feeling unwanted. In this case, your steps might include:

- Find meaningful volunteer work — tutoring children, assisting at a nonprofit dedicated to a cause you have passion for, volunteering at your place of worship or a hospital, helping out at a shelter or serving at a pet clinic

- Do something every day that makes another person smile
- Create a regular schedule of phone calls, texts and letter-writing to stay in touch with people who are important to you; make sure you spend most of your communication time with them asking about them rather than talking about you (in other words, be interested, not interesting!)
- Create a schedule for visiting family and friends, so you always have a visit to anticipate

Enact the Plan

You get the idea. Take the time to discover and name your fears. Then think of options that could help, and choose where you're going to start. You may be surprised by how much confidence you gain simply by implementing a realistic step-by-step plan.

Most likely, several of your fears won't even materialize. For those that do, you gain a sense of greater control and hope of surviving them when you've made plans ahead of time and thought through the options. Knowing you will be OK in the long run can help alleviate your fears. No matter what happens, you can survive and hopefully thrive.

Move Forward with Greater Confidence

Throughout this process, be assured that your feelings of fear need not last forever. When you allow their expression and deal with them honestly, they will eventually resolve. Don't let fear and worry rule your life, and open up room for hope.



Amy Florian is an educator, author, public speaker, and Founder/CEO of Corgenius, the first professional training firm to focus on life transition support. With a style that combines grace, good-natured humor and rock solid science, Amy travels the country teaching financial advisors and other business professionals how to better serve clients experiencing loss, grief, and transition. She also educates clergy, hospice staff and volunteers, social workers and others who work with the grieving. Amy serves on the advisory board of Soaring Spirits International, a nonprofit organization that provides support for widowed people around the globe.

HOW TO LIVE SUSTAINABLY IN THE COLDER MONTHS

These changes have a greater impact than you might think

by Elle Moulin

Thinking about how to live sustainably, conserve energy and ultimately save a few dollars can be challenging any time of the year. But it is especially troublesome when the temperature outside drops below freezing. There are some simple ways, though, to implement more environmentally-friendly practices into your life as we enter the chilly months.

Here are five ways to be more sustainable in the winter:

SEAL AIR LEAKS

The small cracks and holes in a home's building envelope (the physical separator between the conditioned and unconditioned area of a building) allow warm air to leak out and cold air to enter. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), if you add up the energy flow from the leaks and cracks in an average home, it's equivalent to leaving a window open every day of the year.

“Environmental issues, specifically climate change, affect everyone, but particularly low-income people and marginalized communities.”

Use rubber weather strips, window kits, caulk guns and foam rods to seal air leaks.

When looking for air leaks, start by investigating the front door and next, look to your windows, says Laura Oakleaf of the Cook County, Ill. sustainability office. Then, check your baseboards to see if you can caulk any areas to prevent future leakage.

PROGRAM YOUR THERMOSTAT

Using a programmable thermostat lets you set the temperature in your home back to a lower level at different hours of the day, such as when you're not home, or at night when you're asleep.

This can have a significantly greater impact on energy saved than you might think. According to Oakleaf, lowering your thermostat by just 1 degree can decrease energy usage by 2%.

The U.S. Department of Energy says turning back your thermostat 7 to 10 degrees from the typical setting for eight hours a day can save you up to 10% a year on heating costs.

"By saving that energy, you are reducing the environmental impact of that energy consumption, which can be pretty substantial," says Shane Stennes, director of sustainability at the University of Minnesota.

MAINTAIN OR REPLACE HEATING SYSTEMS

At least once a year, have a contractor come to your home to do a routine check-up and perform any mandatory maintenance on your boiler, furnace or heat pump to ensure that the freezing weather won't inflate your energy bill.

In addition to regular check-ups, you may also want to consider fully replacing equipment if it has been used for more than a decade, the EPA says.

"If your heating equipment is more than ten-years-old, it may be time for a replacement to a more energy-efficient unit. While initially an expensive investment, replacing old equipment with ENERGY STAR qualified equipment saves more energy and money in the long run," according to the agency's website.

For heating equipment to be ENERGY STAR qualified, it must have energy performance among the top 25% of all similar products and be certified by an independent third-party to provide increased energy efficiency.

USE NONTOXIC DE-ICING METHODS

Switching to nontoxic de-icing methods avoids creating hazardous waste during the snowy season.

Chloride, which is found in salt, has created increasing issues for our drinking water through its contamination of groundwater. A study by the University of Minnesota found that about 78% of salt applied in the Twin Cities for winter maintenance, for instance, is either transported to groundwater or remains in the local lakes and wetlands.

Chemical de-icers create hazards for animals, trees, shrubs and the environment in general. Antifreeze leaking from car engines, along with chemical de-icers that melt on driveways and roads can pollute surface water and groundwater through soil.

Because we rely on about a third of all groundwater for our drinking water, our de-icing choices have major impact on our water consumption.

Alternatives to chemical de-icers include clean clay cat litter, sand or fireplace/stove ash, according to the EPA.

Also: Avoid gasoline-powered snow removal machines and use electric ones instead. While they still consume energy, they don't emit greenhouse gases. An alternative to both would be using snow shovels and brooms to clear your driveways and walkways.



GIVE YOUR SUPPORT TO CHARITIES

Environmental issues, specifically climate change, affect everyone, but particularly low-income people and marginalized communities, says Stennes.

"One of the ways people can be more sustainable in how they act is to look for charities and organizations that are helping to address those populations and those people who are disproportionately impacted by environmental injustice and environmental issues," Stennes notes.

Finding groups to support gives the chance to find the humanity in the issue of sustainability. Some organizations include the Climate Justice Alliance; the Indigenous Environmental Network; the Deep South Center for Environmental Justice; GreenLatinos and the Asian Pacific Environmental Network.



Elle Moulin is a Minneapolis-based freelance photographer and an intern at Next Avenue. She graduated from the University of Minnesota with a degree in photojournalism.

How to Motivate Without ‘Bullying’ During Caregiving

Develop a range of strategies so the care receiver feels supported, not challenged

by Barry J. Jacobs, AARP

During my caregiving years, my mother and I had many tense moments about rousing her from bed to get ready for medical appointments. I'd pop into her bedroom and wake her, then remind her a few minutes later that she really needed to get up, then cajole her, plead with her, and ultimately use my sternest, I-mean-business tone.



I thought I was helping motivate her in those instances. She'd say she felt like I was bullying her.

I never liked being called a bully and denied it was so. After all, we were always in a rush. If I pressured her, I reasoned, then it was for her own good. But in retrospect now, 20 months after her death, I wonder if I was in the right. What really mattered to her during those times? Was she clinging to the comfort of her pillow because she was still tired or even depressed? Was it more important for her to have control over her own life and sleep in than submit to another routine exam with a doctor who couldn't help her much anyway? Instead, I overruled her and expected her to "obey" me.

I don't think I'm the only family caregiver to transgress the blurry line between supportive guidance and arm-twisting. Sometimes when tired or frustrated or impatient — or when there really is a situation of dire urgency — many caregivers are prone to pressure care receivers too hard to conform to schedules and regimens. We rationalize the approach we've taken on the basis of practicality and expedience. But many of us second-guess ourselves later about whether it was necessary.

Certain things do have to get done. Otherwise, family caregivers might feel that they are guilty of irresponsibility and neglect. But how can we manage to be coaches, not bosses, and effective motivators, not feared bullies? Here are some ideas.

Rarely put tasks over the relationship: There are few caregiving tasks so crucial that they warrant trampling a care receiver's feelings in the process of accomplishing them. Rather, there are what I think of as front- and back-burner issues.

On the front burner are mostly issues having to do with safety, such as taking medications appropriately or driving capably, for which the caregiver should be firm and persuasive. However, most other issues are on the back burner of importance and need for action. For these items, caregivers should allow care receivers to exercise as much choice as possible and shift plans accordingly. That means being more flexible and accommodating, as well as respectful. In retrospect I could have scheduled my mother's doctor's appointments later in the day, even if it was less convenient for me, or canceled them altogether.

Develop a range of approaches and strategies: Great coaches are attuned to the moods of their players and apply the right touches at the right time to encourage maximum effort and performance. Great caregivers, too, can sense what care receivers are feeling at a given moment and tailor their requests — for instance, appealing to reason, resorting to silly humor or changing the subject entirely — to the approach that will motivate. In general, I found that a gentler style was more apt to work with my mother, but there were also times that she wouldn't agree with me at all. That's when I would turn to my wife, who, with a smile and an even softer tone, could somehow win my mother's cooperation making the same request she'd already rejected from me.

Solicit and heed feedback: We can sometimes get so wrapped up in the hectic pace of caregiving life that we lose a sense of how we are coming across to others. But we can listen to feedback from family members about how we are conducting ourselves. Take a moment to say to the care receiver, "We are having to work together more closely nowadays than we ever have before. Am I treating you the way you want to be treated?" Regard the answer seriously.

Beware of creeping bullying: No caregiver sets out to be the sort who pushes others around. But if he finds that applying pressure to the care receiver is the most efficient way of completing his many tasks, then he may slowly tend toward using sheer force. Caregiving isn't about efficiency, however; it's about caring. And nothing could be less caring than bending people to one's will. We need to be aware of the excesses of our own styles and never convince ourselves that the ends justify the means.



Barry J. Jacobs, a clinical psychologist, family therapist and healthcare consultant, is the co-author of the book *AARP Meditations for Caregivers* (Da Capo, 2016). Follow him on Twitter and Facebook.

HOW ISOLATED FAMILY CAREGIVERS CAN CONNECT

They should ask friends and family for support

by Barry J. Jacobs, AARP



"I used to reach out to our siblings and so-called friends, but then I figured what's the point?" said Jim, a 67-year-old man who's been caring for his wife with multiple sclerosis for 35 years. "No one really understands what we go through and I'm not sure they care. So I just focus on her and me now."

At this initial psychotherapy appointment, I'm tempted to press Jim on the importance of drawing on others' support to feel encouraged and uplifted through hard times. But I'm afraid he'll look at me as if I don't understand either. And maybe I don't. I have no idea how many years of rejection and neglect he faced before deciding to stop asking for help or even the occasional phone call and, as a self-protective measure, relied entirely on himself.

Research has long demonstrated that feeling positively connected to others leads to good health. One study found that it reduced the likelihood of early death by 50 percent. But social isolation or disconnection is seen as an increasing American health problem. A highly publicized Brigham Young University study in 2015 found that prolonged social isolation is as harmful as smoking 15 cigarettes a day — more harmful than obesity. And a 2019 University of Michigan-AARP poll of adults between the ages of 50 and 80 found 1 in 3 adults say they lack regular companionship, and 1 in 4 say they feel isolated from other people at least some of the time.

Hurt and angry family caregivers, such as Jim, are among them. In part, they are so consumed by the urgency of caregiving demands they de-prioritize seeking social support. But many also feel a sense of hopelessness and despondency about the prospect of connecting with the people who should be there for them. They bitterly perceive that family members and friends have turned their backs on them to blithely live their own lives. These caregivers then turn inward, hunkering down in their own homes, increasingly cut off from the rest of the world.

How do we help family caregivers cope with repeated rejection and still seek social connection? Here are some ideas:

BELIEVE IN THE POWER OF SOCIAL REPLENISHMENT

The same caregivers who, for their loved ones' sake, make sure they get flu shots and do daily push-ups to remain physically healthy don't bother to pick up the phone, go online or attend support groups to maintain their emotional health. But social ties are like strong ropes that can hold them up, especially when their worries weigh on them and their spirits sink. Even the most confirmed introverts or dedicated misanthropes should put faith in the knowledge they are members of a greater community that can buoy the health of all.



CONNECT WITH THE WILLING

It isn't worth it for caregivers to pursue family members or friends who are unwilling or unreachable. But that doesn't mean closing the door on all humankind. If family fails them, then there are neighbors and local community groups or church members. If the local community fails them, then there are apps, Facebook groups, and in-person, online or telephonic support groups with people dealing with similar challenges who will listen, understand and give pertinent advice. Even for the busiest and most harried family caregiver, there's no reason to be completely isolated unless he's determined to be alone in his struggles with the care receiver.

GIVE HELP TO GET HELP

A cynical view of people might posit that most are so wrapped up in themselves that they have a hard time empathizing with others. Nevertheless, the late psychiatrist Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy believed that almost all of us have an innate sense of reciprocity and fairness — that is, if others give to us, then we will give to them. It may sound counterintuitive but family caregivers can use this insight to increase their social supports. Rather than reaching out for social nurturance, they should first offer it readily to others. For example, Jim can call his siblings to see how they're doing and what they need. They may surprise him by ultimately responding in kind.

DON'T GIVE UP SEEKING ASSISTANCE AND COMPANIONSHIP

But even if others don't reciprocate as they should after a caregiver has made a helping gesture, it is still senseless for him to lick his wounds in bitterness and withdraw from all relationships. Social connectedness is too essential an ingredient of well-being. Caregivers need to move on, regretfully accepting the blinkered outlooks and limited compassion of family and friends, but not quit trying. Be calculating and pragmatic. Take your vitamins, get your sunshine, and find your people.

VANDERBILT CHILD & FAMILY CENTER



Caregiver Support Group

SELF CARE AND MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT FOR CAREGIVERS

SPECIAL GUEST: KAYSE MARTIN,
COUNCIL ON AGING OF MIDDLE TENNESSEE

FEBRUARY 12, 2020
12-1 PM
THE LIVING ROOM
GODCHAUX NURSING ANNEX

Feel free to bring your lunch. Light snacks will be provided.

For more info: toya.y.cobb@vanderbilt.edu

UPCOMING EVENTS



HEALTHY DISCIPLINE

Hosted by The Margaret Cuninggim Women's Center

Speaker: Dr. Seth Scholer, Professor of Pediatrics, School of Medicine

January 16, 2020, 12:00 PM

Sarratt, Room 363

Lunch will be served on a first-come basis.



MLK COMMEMORATIVE SERIES

Featuring panelists **Janelle Monáe**, Grammy-nominated singer-songwriter and **Yusef Salaam**, one of the Exonerated Five, formally known as the Central Park Five.

January 19, 2020, 5:30 PM

Langford Auditorium



**COUNCIL ON
AGING**
OF MIDDLE TENNESSEE

CAREGIVER COACHING PARTNERSHIP

The Vanderbilt Child and Family Center and the Council on Aging of Middle Tennessee is partnering to offer coaching for Vanderbilt faculty and staff who are caregivers and leadership staff who manage caregivers.

Details Coming Soon!

Vanderbilt Child & Family Center Presents

SUMMER CAMP FAIR 2020

FEBRUARY 20, 2020

5:00-6:30 PM

VANDERBILT MEMORIAL GYM

301 25TH AVENUE SOUTH

The Summer Camp Fair is a free event featuring 12+ day & overnight camps, Vanderbilt sponsored camps, and programs from the Nashville Metro area. Join us at Vandy's Women's Basketball Family Fest, meet camp representatives, gather information and ask your questions!

Participating Camps Include:

- Adventure Science Center
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- Camp Vandy
- Dyer Observatory Space Science Camp
- Belle Meade Plantation
- Vanderbilt Programs for Talented Youth
- Harpeth Hall

AND MORE!

Registration to attend will begin February 3, 2020. Stay tuned for more information!

For questions contact
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