40TH ANNUAL CAREGIVER CONFERENCE

# Healing While Helping

## Supporting Loved Ones with Dementia Without Losing Yourself

Northern Virginia Dementia Care Consortium
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Inova Center for Personalized Health
Conference Center · Fairfax, Virginia



# Meet your presenter



## Liletta Harlem

**President, MNM**
Executive Director,
Dementia Caregiver Support Program

01 **Recognize the strain**
Name stress, grief, and changing roles.

02 **Protect your well-being**
Practice small, realistic tools for care.

03 **Build your support**
Share care at home and seek help at work.

# Caregiving changes more than your schedule

## Stress

Decisions, disrupted sleep, and constant responsibility can feel relentless.

## Changing roles

You may be a spouse, child, or friend—and now a care coordinator, too.

## Grief

You can mourn changes in a relationship while your loved one is still here.

## Guilt and mixed feelings

Love, frustration, sadness, and even joy can exist together.

**Reflect:** What has caregiving changed for me—and what do I need now?



Source: Alzheimer's Association · Grief and Loss

# Notice your own warning signs

## Common signals of strain

Exhaustion that does not lift

Sleep or appetite changes

Irritability or frequent worry

Pulling away from other people

Trouble concentrating

**Do not dismiss it:**
“I just need to push harder.”

## Respond with support

“My health needs attention, too.”

If signs recur or interfere with daily life, talk with your doctor or a mental health professional.



Source: Alzheimer’s Association · Caregiver Stress

# Pause before the pressure grows

Try this brief check-in, if it feels comfortable. Keep care and safety covered.

1. **Pause and breathe comfortably.**
   Relax your shoulders. Notice your feet on the floor.

2. **Name a feeling or need.** “I feel overwhelmed. I need a break.”

3. **Choose one safe next step.** Ask for help. Sip water. Reset the task.

# Less conflict. More connection.

**Quiet space.** Simple words. One question at a time. Give time to respond.

## When correction adds pressure

Loved one: “I need to go home.”

“You are home. I already told you that.”

## Try reassurance instead

Listen for the feeling behind the words.

“You want to feel at home. I’m here with you.”

**Respect dignity:** speak directly to your loved one and adapt to their needs.



Source: Alzheimer’s Association · Communication

# Protect your well-being without guilt

1 **Keep your own health on the calendar.**
Meals, rest, movement, and medical visits matter.

2 **Plan safe respite—not just spare time.**
Arrange trusted care while you take a break.

3 **Keep something that belongs to you.**
A friend, hobby, faith practice, or quiet moment.

4 **Set a limit you can sustain.**
Share the task before you reach exhaustion.

## A boundary can sound like this

“I can cover mornings. I need someone else for Tuesday afternoon.”

A limit is not abandonment. It helps make care sustainable.

**Choose one:** What can I protect this week?

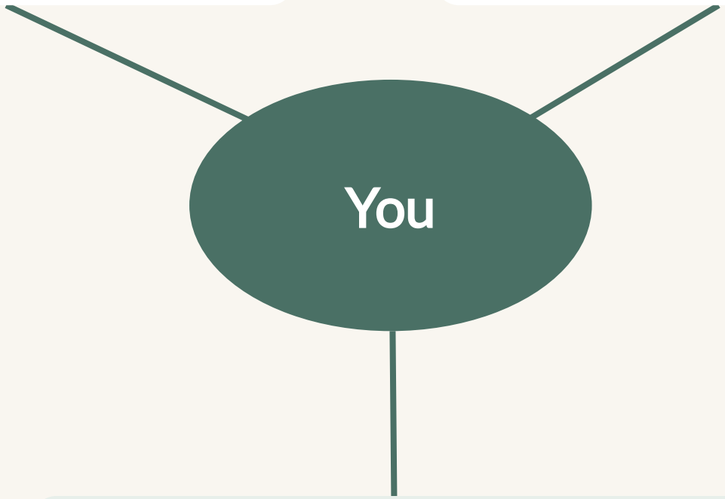


Source: National Institute on Aging · Caring for Yourself

# Care is a team effort—at home and at work

**Family and friends**
Specific, shared tasks

**Community and care**
Guidance and respite




**Backup plan**
Who steps in if you cannot?

## At home: make the ask clear

“Can you bring dinner on Thursday?” Put agreed tasks in a shared calendar.

## At work: start a conversation

Ask HR about flexible schedules, leave policies, and employee assistance, if available.

Share only what you choose.

# A local bridge between families and workplaces




## Northern Virginia Dementia Support & Workplace Alliance

**A program of My Natural Me**

CareConnect describes two goals:

**Connect caregivers** with community support.

**Help employers** build dementia-informed workplaces.

Serving Prince William County and Northern Virginia.
Ask about current programs: **info@mynaturalme.info**

# Support for you, too

MNM partner spotlight · Mental health & wellness

## Palesa Osei-Tutu, LCSW

**Founder, Sit Awhile & Heal LLC**

Licensed Clinical Social Worker with more than 23 years across behavioral health and social work.

She provides culturally responsive counseling, clinical supervision, workshops, and consultation.

### Connect with Palesa

**info@sit-awhile.com · 571-406-3144**
**sit-awhile.com**



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