



A Self-Care Manifesto for Caregivers to the Dying and the Bereaved

We who care for the bereaved and the dying have a wondrous opportunity; to help others embrace and grow through grief – and to lead fuller, more deeply-lived lives ourselves because of their important work.

But our work is draining – physically, emotionally and spiritually. We must first care for ourselves if we want to care well for others. This manifesto is intended to empower you to practice good self-care.

1. *I deserve to lead a joyful, whole life.*

No matter how much I love and value my work, my life is multifaceted. My family, my friends, my other interests and my spirituality also deserve my time and attention. I deserve my time and attention.

2. *My work does not define me.* I am a unique, worthy person outside my work life. While relationships can help me feel good about myself, they are not what is inside me. Sometimes I need to stop “doing” and instead focus on simply “being”.
3. *I am not the only one who can help dying and bereaved people.* When I feel indispensable, I tend to ignore my own needs. There are many talented caregivers in my community who can also help the dying and the bereaved
4. *I must develop healthy eating, sleeping and exercise patterns.* I am aware of the importance of these things for those I help, but I may neglect them myself. A well-balanced diet, adequate sleep and regular exercise allow me to be the best I can be.
5. *If I've been over involved in my care giving for too long, I may have forgotten how to take care of myself.* I may need to rediscover ways of caring for and nurturing myself. I may need to relearn how to explore my own feelings instead of focusing on everybody else's
6. *I must maintain boundaries in my helping relationships.* As a death caregiver. I cannot avoid getting emotionally involved with dying and bereaved people. Nor would I want to. Active empathy allows me to be a good companion to them. However, I must remember I am responsible *to* others, not *for* others.
7. *I am not perfect and I must not expect myself to be.* I often wish my helping efforts were always successful. But even when I offer compassionate, “on-target” help, the recipient of that help isn't always prepared to use it. And when I do make mistakes, I should see them as an integral part of learning and growth, not as measurements of my self-worth.



8. *I must practice effective time-management skills.* I must see practical goals for how I spend my time. I must also remember Pareto's principle: twenty percent of what I do nets eighty percent of my results.
9. *I must also practice setting limits and alleviating stresses I can do something about.* I must work to achieve a clear sense of expectations and set realistic deadlines. I should enjoy what I do accomplish in helping others but shouldn't berate myself for what is beyond me.
10. *I must listen to my inner voice.* As a caregiver to the dying and the bereaved, I will at times become grief overloaded. When my inner voice begins to whisper its fatigue, I must listen carefully and allow myself some grief downtime.
11. *I should express the personal me in both my work and play.* I shouldn't be afraid to demonstrate my unique talents and abilities. I must also make time each day to remind myself of what is important to me. If I only had three months to live, what would I do?
12. *I am a spiritual being.* I must spend alone time focusing on self-understanding and self-love. To be present to those I work with and to learn from those I companion, I must appreciate the beauty of life and living. I must renew my spirit.

Taken from Alan Wolfelt

