

Course Name:	Caregiving Essentials	
Course Facilitator Name:	Donna Thomson	
Course Facilitator Information:	crgvr@mcmaster.ca	
Course Dates:	October 13, 2020	August 9, 2021
Course Materials:	All course materials are provided within the actual online course.	

Course Overview

This not-for-credit course provides important information about the role of the natural (family or friend) caregiver supporting an older adult. Divided into five modules, the course is self-paced and includes diverse learning materials, such as relevant readings, videos, short quizzes, webinars and opportunities to make contributions to online discussion groups. The goal of the course is to improve the knowledge, confidence, and overall health and well-being of informal caregivers in Ontario through education.

The titles of the five modules are the following:

- (i) You and the caregiver role
- (ii) Your caregiver toolbox: Health and medical fundamentals
- (iii) Navigating complex systems and getting the support you need
- (iv) The importance of looking after you
- (v) Resources

This course was developed in collaboration with the McMaster University Continuing Education, the McMaster Institute for Research on Aging (MIRA), and THRIVE group. The creation of the course was funded by the Government of Ontario, Ministry of Seniors Affairs with ongoing funding provided by the Regional Geriatric Programs of Ontario.

Following this course, you may wish to consider taking Caregiving Strategies, run by the Regional Geriatric Programs of Ontario. This complementary course provides more detailed information about Pain, Mobility, Nutrition, Continence, Polypharmacy, Delirium, and Social Engagement for Caregivers of Older adults with frailty. More information can be found here: <https://www.rgps.on.ca/caregiving-strategies/>

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this course, you will be able to:

- discuss health and social conditions relevant to your caregiving setting as well as optimal aging practices for the older adults in your care
- navigate the health and social services systems to better access the supports for the older adults in your care
- complete a personalized Caregiver Action Plan (CAP)
- describe the importance and strategies of self-care for the caregiver
- demonstrate new competencies in using online technology skills in a learning environment

Facilitator Information

Donna Thomson

I am a caregiver, author and activist who is passionate about learning from each other's experiences in a community of care. I care for our son Nicholas who is 32 years old and has severe disabilities. With my sister, I also cared for our Mom who lived with dementia until she died in 2018 at the age of 96. I look forward to a rich conversation with you all about both the joys and the challenges of our caregiving lives.

Method of Learning

This course is designed to be self-paced, and to be completed in the manner that most benefits you as a participant.

Being a caregiver can mean many interruptions and changes as you balance the many 'hats' you wear in life. Participating in the discussion component of the course is a key element in developing the habit of sharing your experience with other caregivers and building a network of support. Creating a network is beneficial for your own well-being and resilience.

Recommended Course Timelines

We recommend spending 20 – 60 minutes every few days over 2 weeks to complete each module. This means you will complete the course over 8 – 10 weeks. The periodic emails you will begin receiving upon registration will serve as opportunities for personal reflection as well as a reminder to revisit the course curriculum. The facilitator will monitor the course and discussion boards and support you if necessary. As well, if you have a concern, send an email to crgvr@mcmaster.ca and the course coordinator will be sure to connect with you.

Two weeks for each of Modules 1 – 4 will enable completion at a reasonable pace. You are welcome to explore Module 5 (Resources) at any time. Also, there may be sections in the modules that are not relevant to you or your care recipient. Feel free to 'pick and choose' those sections and topics that are most helpful given your caregiving context.

This is an open registration course; regardless of when you register, this course will close on August 9, 2021, so you may choose to spend more than the 8-10 weeks on the course, or revisit content as you wish. The discussion boards will remain active throughout the full duration of the course and you are welcome to read or contribute anytime.

Course Components

This course is composed of a variety of activities to help you learn. We all have a learning style that is natural to us when we are learning new things – a preferential way in which we absorb, process, comprehend and retain new information. For some people, this is reading; others may prefer watching, and still others need to 'do' something. Most of us need a combination of all of these. You, no doubt,

have some specific goals in mind for what you want to learn from this course. Here are the ways you can engage with the materials and with other people taking the course at the same time as you.

Module Information

Each module starts with an introduction to the topics covered in the module and an overview of what you can expect to learn. It also has a statement of learning outcomes, so you know how the learning in the module ties together and how the module will unfold.

The module 'notes' will point out key issues for you to consider. You can think about the notes as the content of the module.

At different times, you will be asked to participate in an activity. An activity might ask you to read an article or view a website for further information, complete a quiz to test yourself on the information in the module, watch a video so that you have an example of a concept, or think about a real-life example of something the module emphasizes. Completing the activities as they arise in the module is a good idea because they will prepare you for what's coming next.

Module 5 is the resource module. You will find a well-organized listing of many resources that are discussed in Modules 1 to 4. A short explanation of the resource's content is provided as well as the title of the resource. You want to be able to find just what you're looking for with minimal time and searching!

When you click on the Content tab in the D2L system, a vertical bar (called the Table of Contents) will appear on the left-hand side of your screen. You can access the modules from there. Each module is divided into a number of topics or sections. You can move forward and backward through the sections by clicking on the arrow keys near the bottom right of your screen.

Discussions

Caregiving can be a lonely and isolating experience but giving and receiving support in a community of caregivers is an important element of self-care and resilience. The course facilitator, Donna Thomson, will always be a listening ear and resource guide on the discussion boards, but often it's the learning and empathetic sharing between caregivers that helps people feel less alone and more able to continue in the role with a sense of purpose and optimism.

Each module has at least one discussion task. Effective learning requires meaningful interaction with others. People have varying experiences and sharing these experiences, along with your thoughts and ideas, is an excellent way to gain new insights and learn what has worked for others.

You will know when to contribute to specific questions in the discussion board through instructions provided in the body of the module. If you would like to return to a discussion at any point in the course, you may do so by clicking on the Discussions tab from the course's opening screen. All of the discussions are listed there, and you are able to choose the discussion that you would like to enter.

To start a new discussion thread, click on the drop-down arrow beside the discussion forum title, choose "Add Topic," fill in the form, and then click on "Save and Close." To reply to an existing discussion thread, click on the topic title, click on the title again, click on "Reply to Thread," fill in the form, and click on "Post."

Because this online course is considered to be a classroom or learning space, it is subject to certain protections, expectations, guidelines and regulations. In particular, please be sure that all of your interactions on the discussion board are respectful. Likewise, the discussion board should not be a place where confidential information is shared. In this course, confidential information may pertain to health, finances, ethical and legal matters as well as other areas.

Remember too that the course is about the caregiving role rather than about specific illnesses. If you have particular concerns about your health and/or the health of your care recipient, please seek the help of a health care provider.

Examples of inappropriate behavior in the course include but are not limited to the following:

- posting inflammatory messages
- using obscene or offensive language online
- discriminating against fellow learners and/or the course facilitator(s)
- using the course to promote a personal agenda such as profit-driven products or services

Quizzes

Each module has a summary quiz at the end of the module whereby you can test yourself on the content covered in the module. You may take the quiz more than once, and, when you choose an answer, you will be provided with feedback – either why you made the correct selection, or why an alternate choice would have been better. Remember – there’s no ‘failing’ this course, so use the quizzes as an opportunity to review what you have learned. You will access the quizzes directly through links provided in the modules.

Polls

At the end of each module, you will find an opinion poll. The poll gives you a chance to provide feedback to the course designers about whether the module provided you with the topics, experiences and learning that you anticipated. It’s an important method by which the course will continue to evolve and improve through time. It’s a short poll, so, if you have time to complete it, it would be appreciated.

The Caregiver Action Plan (CAP)

Everyone will have a different reason for taking this course, and it’s quite likely that you will engage with topics that you haven’t thought about before (or maybe you have thought *enough* about certain topics but new perspectives are always valuable).

Because there’s a lot of information in the course, a caregiver action plan or CAP has been prepared as a ‘working document’ for you to use as the course progresses. During each module, you will be provided with information and insights to help you complete various sections of the CAP. Some sections may be more relevant or important to you than others, so you can personalize the CAP document to meet your needs. When you’ve completed the course, you will have a document that you can rely on, share with others, take to appointments and update as needed. It’s a great ‘take away’ from the course.

WEBINARS or Synchronous Sessions:

Over the duration of the course, webinars or live (virtual) chats will be hosted approximately once a month. Roughly half of all the online events will be podcast presentations on timely caregiving themes and the other half will be opportunities to chat and share care experiences. All live events will be recorded and accessible to view later for anyone unable to attend at the scheduled times.

Course Certificate of Completion

For individuals who complete all modules, we are pleased to offer a certificate upon completion of the course. This certificate is issued by D2L (Desire2Learn) and is not currently eligible for McMaster University credit.

Course Schedule

As explained above in the Course Overview section, the course is self-paced. However, most people do their best learning when they have some structure or a plan. Below is a recommended plan for progressing through the course. Details on the activities that comprise each module are listed below in the section called The Modules.

Weeks 1 & 2	Take a bit of time to review the components of the course. Visit the modules and tools available (quizzes and discussions) and familiarize yourself with the Course Outline so that you are aware of how the course is organized. Introduce yourself and your loved one in the discussions board. Check out the Resources module since you will likely access it throughout the course. Complete Module 1
Weeks 3 & 4	Complete Module 2
Weeks 5 & 6	Complete Module 3
Weeks 7 & 8	Complete Module 4

The Modules

Each module includes various activities to support learning. As best you can, you are encouraged to complete them. The activities are not ‘for grades.’ There are no assignments or formal tests for you to submit.

Module 1: You and the Caregiver Role

Topics Explored in this Module

- Roles and responsibilities of the caregiver
- So, you’re a caregiver. Now what?
- Set yourself up for success
- What caregivers need to know about ethics

Activities

- Discuss: Make a brief written contribution to the discussion board. The topic is “How did you end up in your caregiver role?”
- Activity: Outline how much time you dedicate to caregiving tasks per day/week/month
- Read: Jann Arden’s passage as she reflects on her late father’s dementia and becomes a mother to her mother
- Activity: List the traits that make you an ideal caregiver and how you will leverage them
- Watch: “Caregiver Readiness” video
- Discuss: Make a brief written contribution to the discussion board. The topic is “Caregiver Action Plans or personalized plans.”
- Take the Quiz: Check your knowledge at the end of Module 1
- **Caregiver Action Plan:** Complete Sections 1A and 1B of your caregiver action plan (CAP).

Module 2: Your Caregiver Toolbox: Health and Medical Fundamentals

Topics Explored in this Module

- Common aging-related health conditions and concerns
- Recognizing and managing change
- Safety at home
- Pain & Medication Management
- Social isolation: What it is and why it is important to the care recipient’s health

Activities

- Take the Quiz: Check your knowledge relative to the following question: “Do you know when to take the person in your care to the emergency room?”
- Discuss: Make a brief written contribution to the discussion board. The topic is “What health conditions do you help manage? How do you find resources and overcome challenges?”
- Read: When it might be wise to stop taking certain medications
- Activity: Fill out the Medication Safety Checklist
- Watch: “My Social Connections” video
- Take the Quiz: Check your knowledge at the end of Module 2
- **Caregiver Action Plan:** Complete Sections 2A, 2B, and 3A of the caregiver action plan (CAP).

Module 3: Navigating Complex Systems and Getting the Support You Need

Topics Explored in this Module

- First things first: Roles and responsibilities
- Planning ahead for legal and financial matters
- What You Need to Know about Financial Planning
- How to find appropriate health, medical and social system resources
- Acting as a caregiver-patient advocate

Activities

- Watch: A video by the Alzheimer Society of Ontario that explains wills and power of attorney
- Read: The unexpected costs of caring for your elderly parents
- Discuss: Make a brief written contribution to the discussion board. The topic is “How do you broach financial topics, such as wills, power of attorney and savings, with the person in your care?”
- Watch: Health Links Explained
- Take the Quiz: Check your knowledge at the end of Module 3
- **Caregiver Action Plan:** Complete Sections 2C, 3B, 3C and 3D of the caregiver action plan (CAP).

Module 4: The Importance of Looking After You

Topics Explored in this Module

- Caring for the caregiver
- How to cope with caregiver stress
- Sources of caregiver support and respite
- After the caregiving

Activities

- Activity: Use a checklist to help identify the impact of stress on you
- Watch: Self-care with Dr. Gordon Schacter
- Discuss: Make a brief written contribution to the discussion board. The topic is “What are some of your personal barriers?”
- Activity: Stress relieving activities
- Discuss: Make a brief written contribution to the discussion board. The topic is “How do you take care of yourself?”
- Watch: “You are not on your own” video
- Read: The way of the ‘post-caregiver’
- Take the Quiz: Check your knowledge at the end of Module 4

Module 5: Resources

The Resources module provides links to a significant number of excellent articles and websites. The resources are organized according to the following topics.

- Caregiving basics
- Health, social conditions and optimal aging practices
- Financial and legal resources
- Government assistance and other benefits and funding for caregivers and recipients
- Medical resources
- National NGOs and disease-specific organizations

- Support resources and services

Discussions – COVID Conversations Corner

- How are you coping with physical and social distancing and isolation policies in place?
- How can we care for both ourselves as caregivers and the care recipient when we are physically isolated from others? What strategies might we try to help us on this journey?
- How can the Community support you during this period of isolation?
- What are you working through? And want others' opinion on?
- What strategies do you use to build moments of small joy into your life?

Technicalities

We have tried throughout the course to ensure that links to resources are functioning/accessible. However, web pages can change. If you notice a broken link, please notify us (crgvr@mcmaster.ca) and we will resolve the issue as soon as possible.

Because this is an online course, you will be using skills that you may or may not use every day. None are difficult but, if you need help, please ask for it. Send an email to crgvr@mcmaster.ca

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