VA Caregiver Support

Building Better Caregivers™
Taking Care of You

A Stanford University Workshop to help Caregivers take better care of themselves: a service of the Department of Veterans Affairs' Caregiver Support Program and the National Council on Aging

What is Building Better Caregivers™ (BBC)?

Building Better Caregivers™ (BBC) is an online workshop for Caregivers who are caring for someone with dementia, memory problems, post-traumatic stress disorder, a serious brain injury, or any other serious injury or illness.

BBC helps Caregivers in two key ways: it offers training in how to provide better care, and it also helps Caregivers learn how to manage their own emotions, stress and physical health.

Caregiving can be an extremely demanding job, and many Caregivers experience isolation and burnout. Some of the most important aspects of becoming a better Caregiver are learning how to manage stress and take good care of yourself.

How does BBC work?

Building Better Caregivers™ is:

- A 6-week, highly interactive, small group workshop.
- Conducted 100% online.
- Made up of 20–25 caregivers who take the online workshop together.
- Led by two trained facilitators, one or both of whom are Caregivers.

What happens in a typical week?

Activities change each week, and over the six weeks will include:

- Reading and interacting with other Caregivers through the online Learning Center.
- Posting Caregiving-related problems and offering help and support to other Caregivers.
- Doing self-tests and activities.
- Posting a personalized weekly Action Plan.
- Participating in problem solving and guided exercises.

How much time does it take?

- Caregivers are asked to log on at least 2–3 times each week and to complete reading and problem solving exercises online, for a total of about 2 hours per week.
- Many Caregivers prefer to log on several times per week for short periods of time.
- There is no upper limit to how much time participants can spend online.

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Why is this workshop online?

BBC is conducted 100% online. Doing a workshop online is useful for many Caregivers because:

- It's flexible: Caregivers can log on any time that is convenient for them.
- It's anonymous: Caregivers use screen names or "handles" instead of their own names.
- It's private: Caregivers never meet face-to-face, which helps some people feel more comfortable sharing personal information and experiences.
- It's unlimited: Caregivers can spend as much time online as they like.
- It's close to home: this allows people with mobility or transportation problems or who have to be home to provide caregiving to participate more easily.
- It's safe: BBC uses a dedicated, secure website.

Who leads Building Better Caregivers™ workshops?

Volunteer facilitators, many of whom are Caregivers themselves, help guide the workshops, facilitate discussions and provide support.

What makes these workshops so successful is that the group is the teacher. The workshop is set up to provide many opportunities for members to learn, problem solve together and support each other.

What topics are covered?

Topics include:

- Managing your stress.
- Communicating more effectively with family, friends, and health professionals.
- Taking care of your own health while caregiving.
- Managing difficult emotions like frustration, fear, and loneliness.
- Managing difficult behaviors, angry outbursts and violence.
- Setting goals and working toward them.
- Getting support from other caregivers and sharing your experiences.
- Tips on how to provide better care.

What about technical requirements?

Caregivers need to have access to a computer and be comfortable using the Internet. The course is designed to work on both Windows and Macintosh platforms and is compatible with a variety of browsers including Internet Explorer, Netscape, Safari, Foxfire, and American Online (AOL). The workshop can also be accessed on a tablet or smart phone, although it is not optimized for these devices. People with dial-up Internet access or slower modems can use the program. It is also ADA compliant, designed to be easily navigated by people with disabilities.

The Help tab on the **Building Better Caregivers**™ website menu bar offers a tutorial on how to use the workshop, how to operate computer features like pop-up windows, and how to e-mail workshop leaders and program staff.

What are the benefits of better self-management?

Self-management coaching gives individuals the skills and confidence to handle their own ongoing challenges. BBC uses the principles of self-management to help Caregivers build their skills in:

- Managing challenging caregiving situations.
- Communicating more effectively with family, friends, and health care providers.
- Dealing with difficult emotions such as frustration, anxiety, fear and anger.
- Feeling more stable and more confident.

Do these workshops work?

Yes! The Stanford self-management workshops, which BBC are based on, have been studied for more than 30 years and have helped hundreds of thousands of people all over the world improve their health and quality of life.

How do I Join Building Better Caregivers™?

Contact Your Local **VA Caregiver Support Coordinator** to register for a **Building Better Caregivers** workshop. Visit *https://va.buildingbettercaregivers.org* for more information.

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