



ARTA and its Branches promote a healthy, active and enhanced quality of life for retired people.

Joan Godbout, NwARTA

Care and Compassion in Covid-Times

The pandemic is diminishing everyone's capacity for giving ... even to those close to us ... we don't have the stamina to be as helpful and compassionate. ⁽¹⁾

During these COVID-times there are increased and unprecedented levels of anxiety and we are encouraged to "take care ... to look after one another". While we need to remain thankful for the many individuals who are full-time caregivers, there is a great need for all of us to join in and to find the time and "stamina to be helpful and compassionate" for one another.

Not only do caring and compassionate acts require personal energy, but also a level of courage and vulnerability is required "to reach out, connect emotionally and truly listen" to family members, friends, or acquaintances. But the ultimate reward is symbiotic.

To ease another's headache is to forget one's own.

Abraham Lincoln

There are a variety of unique ways to connect with those who come into our lives with *tender lovin' care* (TLC). But perhaps of greatest value is **listening non-**

judgementally. It may be difficult to accept and respect feelings, experiences and values that are very different from our own and to simply allow the other person to "tell their own story". Also, it is far too easy to feel that we must "contribute to the conversation" rather than seeking to understand by questioning or paraphrasing. Personally, this is most difficult with those who are closest to me – *Argh!!* another area for personal improvement.



By telling their own story, individuals often gain awareness and insight into their own situation. Therefore, the role of a caring and compassionate friend is simply to take time to listen and to "walk alongside without leading the way". Again, on a personal note, I've found that I want to show I'm engaged in the conversation and that I'm empathetic by reflecting a personal experience, but this may not be the best strategy. "Just being there", being supportive and encouraging is often all that is needed. It's also tempting to offer unhelpful advice or platitudes such as, "You just need to ...". We are all different in our approaches and

this is certainly where non-judgemental support and encouragement take the forefront. Yes, this may be personally draining, yet it can be a rewarding social connection. The caring friend is not a professional counsellor or therapist, but he/she is simply socially present. Not all of us are able to excel in this role; this type of interaction is not always in our forte. However, one small act of TLC can be powerful and has the potential for a ripple effect.

TLC is not a one-way street. There are times we are the ones in need of others' care and compassion. Mutual "social support and social engagement are

Social support and social engagement are critical components of mental health ... It is important to listen to what the older adult feels about the quality of connections, how he/she perceives quality of relationships ... ⁽²⁾

critical components of mental health" but at the base is engaging in genuine listening and compassion. We are all connected and need to be even more so during these COVID-times, and it is certainly a lesson for our future beyond COVID.

References:

⁽¹⁾ "Supporting those close to us during the Pandemic". *Catalyst*. (Mental Health Commission of Canada, January 2021). <https://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/English/catalyst-january-2021-supporting-those-close-us-during-pandemic>

⁽²⁾ Mental Commission of Canada, *Mental Health First Aid for Seniors*, Section5|Page5, January 2017.