

Self-Help for Caregivers with Existential Distress

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused widespread disruption and distress. Further, "existential distress" is a known, understandable result of giving care to a terminally ill person. In the midst of distress, it can be difficult to gather oneself to think clearly. However, researchers have identified several components of existential distress that, when considered by the caregiver, may provide some relief. Although intense feelings may emerge as a result of answering the questions below, neuroscience research supports use of the brain's cognitive functions to ease and regulate emotions. As gently and compassionately as possible, fill in some or all of the blanks by questions of interest to you in the chart below. Although questions are asked in present tense, mentally shift the tense to correspond with each time period.

	Before	Currently	Possibly in the future
What gives your life meaning?			
What gives your life purpose?			
Who are you? What is your identity?			
How connected are you to others? To the world?			
How isolated are you from others? From the world?			
By what means do you meet your needs for personal growth?			
By what means do you meet your spiritual and/or religious needs?			
What is the status of your quality of life?			
About what do you feel guilty?			
For what are you responsible?			
About what have you believed you were responsible and found yourself powerless to influence?			
Do you feel betrayed? If so, by what or by whom?			

How do you handle worried thoughts about the future? Regrets about the past?			
How do you decide what to do?			
About the person for whom you are caring, what distresses you the most about their illness?			
What about the person's illness or condition doesn't make sense to you?			
About the person, what do you miss most?			
What are your feelings and thoughts about the death of the person for whom you are caring?			
What are your feelings and thoughts about your death?			
What did you believe was true or real that's now called into question?			
What do you now understand? What wisdom have you gained?			
What do you accept? About yourself, others, the world, life as a whole?			
Within constraints, in what ways are you free?			
Given what you are now up against, what are you hoping for? What else?			
In what ways are you doing the best you can, based on what you know, with the resources you have at this time?			
(What additional question would be helpful to ask? Please fill it in.)			