



“Emotional Renewal Guided Imagery for Caregivers: Looking After Yourself While Helping a Loved One”

©Lynn Joseph, Ph.D.

Track 1: “Introduction”

Welcome to “Emotional Renewal Guided Imagery for Caregivers: Looking After Yourself While Helping a Loved One”. I’m Dr. Lynn Joseph. If you are a caregiver looking after a loved one who is chronically ill or disabled, whether the care recipient lives with you or not, and whether you are employed full-time, part-time, or retired, you probably experience caregiving-related stress and exhaustion. Of course, caring for a family member shows love and can be a very rewarding personal experience. Yet studies show that 46 to 59 percent of caregivers are clinically depressed. In lieu of these statistics, you may want to take some steps to lessen your stress level. You have already taken a positive step toward stress reduction and self-care by listening to this introduction.

This program uses guided imagery to help you reduce stress and depression. Simply put, guided imagery is a thought process that directs and focuses the imagination to create an experience in the mind. You might say it’s a directed daydream. Positive change can happen quickly by using imagery because the brain thinks in images. Experiencing the imagery through *all five senses*—sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch—enhances the power and depth of your experience so that your subconscious cannot distinguish between a vivid mental experience and an actual physical one. In other words, the subconscious mind becomes an ally when we “feed” it positive experiences. In the process, you will be better able to deal with situations now and in the future.

In summary, because caregivers generally undergo a range of painful thoughts and feelings—impacting both personal life and career—I am providing you with a guided imagery recording that can help you restore life balance, a sense of control, hopefulness, and a sense of personal peace to your life. Each of the guided imagery exercises can stand alone, that is, can be listened to independently of the others, and in any order. In as little time as five to ten minutes with this recording, you will find yourself more *relaxed, patient, and efficient*.

As busy as you are and as much as you do for others, you may be thinking, “But I don’t have the *time* to care for myself.” If this sounds like you, then consider beginning with Track #7, called Stress Reduction and Healing Sleep, and listen as you fall asleep at night. It is a passive relaxation exercise that will help you to fall asleep quickly and sleep soundly for quick relief. In fact, caring for *yourself* is your most important job. What good will you be to the person you are caring for if you become ill or worse?

As you build each of the exercises into your routine over time, you may be surprised to find yourself becoming more positive, trusting in your intuitive self, and spiritually at peace. A couple of the exercises even lend themselves well to multi-tasking while listening, that is, listening while you are doing something else—such as preparing a meal. Many of the exercises are designed to significantly *relax* you; so please do *not* listen while driving a vehicle.

This program is designed to help you maintain emotional health, begin to take better care of yourself, and renew your hope for the future. While as a family caregiver, you want to help a loved one in need, you may also feel a range of distressing emotions such as frustration, impatience, anxiety, sadness, entrapment, resentment, anger, and even guilt. Careers, friendships, loving relationships, and self-care activities may be sacrificed. If so, the resulting life imbalance and fatigue severely inhibits the ability to care for anyone. In other words, if you don’t take care of yourself, you will have little to give to others.

Thus, it’s important to develop and maintain a lifestyle that will help you renew. You will be encouraged and supported throughout this recording to develop a routine that ultimately includes:

- Exercise,
- Eating healthily,
- Getting plenty of sleep,
- Reconnecting with family and friends, and asking for help,
- Taking time for laughter and hobbies,
- Setting boundaries with others in respect to your time,
- Journaling your thoughts and feelings, and
- Using stress management techniques.

Other things that can also be of great help are:

- Drawing or painting your feelings,
- Joining a support group, and
- Speaking with a professional counselor.

You may not be able to accomplish all these things, and that's *okay*. Do NOT beat yourself up for not doing more. Go *easy* on yourself. Begin with the things you sense would be *most* helpful to you at this time. Remember that taking action gives us a sense of control, even if the first steps are baby steps. For example, you might have coffee with a friend. Also, try walking or gardening for ten minutes three times a week and work up to twenty minutes three times a week. Perhaps the care recipient can walk with you. Exercise helps you sleep better, increases energy, and reduces tension and depression.

Let's move on to a brief description of each of the seven tracks on this CD. You are listening to Track 1 now.

Track 2, called Boosting Self-Love and Self-Esteem, includes affirmations—positive statements—to give you a sense of control and mastery over events in your life and increase your self-love and self-respect. You will begin to feel the satisfaction of being of service to yourself as well as others. Relaxing suggestions will remind you to take care of *your* body and mind, for example getting enough sleep and eating well-balanced meals and to include in your day at least one activity you enjoy, such as playing music, or taking ten minutes to chat with a friend. If you tend to be self-critical, and lax in your self-care routine, then this track will be *especially* helpful to you.

Track 3, called Planning a Smooth Day, guides you through planning and mentally rehearsing an efficient timeline for the day that honors *your* needs as well as the needs of others. Preparing a schedule makes us feel more in control of our time—even if much of that time is spent fulfilling duties and responsibilities. You will be given time during the exercise to get out a schedule and jot down the things you plan to do that day. Since this exercise helps you prepare for the day, it is best played as you awaken in the morning or while dressing or eating breakfast. I think this will result in finding yourself more relaxed, focused, and efficient. If you tend to feel anxious about what you can get done each day, then this track will be *especially* helpful to you.

In Track 4: Healing Stressful Feelings, you will be guided through a healing process; that is, to first acknowledge your true feelings, for example grief for the loss of a part of your life or that of your loved one, sadness, anger, guilt, hopelessness, or any other burdensome emotions, and then to express those feelings safely in your inner world and reach a place of forgiveness and acceptance when it feels right for you. If these heavy emotions continue unaddressed, they will eat at you and block your *ability to be happy*.

Following the exercise, you may find it helpful to write about your thoughts and feelings—honestly and spontaneously—using a journal or notebook reserved for this purpose. Most people feel progressively better each time they listen to this exercise. If your emotional pain feels unbearable, speak to your physician or a therapist. It may be time to seek treatment for depression.

Track 5: Connecting With Your Future Self, introduces you to that part of you who has yet to come into existence—your Future Self. It may be an image or essence of you a year or more into the future, even five or ten years from now when you have achieved the quality of life you desire and the wisdom that time can bring. Studies tell us that imagining meeting our successful, healthy future selves brings us mental, emotional, and even behavioral benefits. From the broader perspective of your Future Self, for example, you may get ideas of how best to deal with life's current challenges; together you will review your present circumstances and allow insights to come forth. If this is your first experience imagining your Future Self, be willing to try it and to follow your intuition. After this exercise, you will want to write about your thoughts and feelings, and any insights that came to you while with your Future Self. For best results, give this exercise your full attention—at least the first few times you listen. If you tend to be pessimistic in outlook, and have difficulty sensing a positive future, then this track will be *especially* helpful to you.

In Track 6: Day's End with Your Higher Self, you will meet with another part of you, called your Higher Self or Inner Guide. Whatever you prefer to call it, this is the deeply intuitive, spiritual part of you that is pure love and wisdom, unencumbered by negative ego. So often it doesn't occur to us to consult our own inner source of wisdom for advice and answers to life's most important questions.

Whatever feels right for you to call this source of wisdom, you will receive comfort and, together, discuss the day, pinpoint your stress level, and lovingly assess the performance of your caregiver team, that is, those family members and friends that support you in your caregiver efforts. If you currently have no team of helpers, you might begin thinking about who might be able and willing to pitch in and help you, and how best to approach them. . . . Together you and your Higher Self or Inner Guide can explore goals, hopes, and avenues for change.

Please resist the temptation to criticize yourself if, at first, you feel you are not *receiving* any communication. Express yourself anyway and *imagine* they are communicating back. Often thoughts and ideas will come to you at that time—or a day or more later—as a sense of knowing. I am often asked, “How can I be sure the

guidance is coming from my inner wisdom and not my negative ego or what I think my parents might have said?" My answer is, "By practicing." It's like exercising a muscle. I recommend that you do not act upon any advice that does not feel right to you. As time goes on, you will come to recognize the inner knowingness that is your Higher Self. The more experience you have with guided imagery and meditation techniques, the more clear your inner communications will become.

Give this exercise your full attention for maximum results. If you would like a deeper connection with your spiritual, intuitive self, then this track will be *especially* helpful to you.

Track 7: Reducing Stress and Sleeping Soundly, is designed to reduce stress and enhance inner peace—that calm center we all seek. Norman Vincent Peale once said, "The cyclone derives its powers from a calm center. So does a person." This exercise includes a passive muscle relaxation exercise with diaphragmatic breathing, and positive affirmations throughout. You will mentally go to a safe and peaceful place of your choice in nature. Once there, you'll drink in its beauty, calm, and peace with all your senses. In addition to reducing stress, the exercise helps to reduce distractions and mental chatter, and improve physical comfort, resulting in sound, restful sleep. . . . Use it anytime you need to relax and reduce your stress level, whether during the day or turning in for the night. In fact, if you listen at the end of the day, you may fall asleep during the recording, which is fine. That's the idea.

To sum up, you have a new resource to help you regain a sense of control over your life, to relieve your stress, heal heavy emotions, and restore hopefulness and inner peace to you.

Remember to go easy on yourself. Let it be an enjoyable process, an evolution of self-discovery. Let's begin.