



Put your own oxygen mask on first

Flight passengers are told to put their own oxygen masks on first in case of emergency because if you can't breathe, how can you help someone else? The same goes for everyday life, particularly when we are under pressure as a caregiver. Different things work for different people - active or relaxing, alone or with someone, an occasional treat or a daily habit.

- Set a time to do something just for you tomorrow

Press pause

Time is precious, and even more so when some of it is given up to caring for and supporting a loved one. You might be wondering how you're supposed to find time to make changes with everything else that is going on. What could you press pause on? What can wait or be replaced? Whether it's some of the housework, that DIY project or the book that you feel like you have to read, if it's not necessary and / or benefiting you then it can wait!

- Decide one thing you can press pause on

Play to your strengths and outsource where you can

There are 24 hours in a day, so using them to do what we're good at and looking for others to fill the gaps helps to use time most effectively to support and care for someone else. Your loved one may be under the care of a health professional because they are the experts, not us. There are other ways to outsource, for example asking someone else to do something, or buying in ready-prepared food instead of preparing everything yourself.

- Pick one thing to outsource to allow you to play to your strengths

Practice makes progress - no one is perfect, and that's ok

You will probably get advice and suggestions – some might work and others might not. Everything you do or don't do helps you to learn. If it worked, great - you can remember it for next time. If it didn't, you know that now. Focus on the progress you're making in learning how to care and support.

- Think about what you've learnt so far

Please – it's ok to ask for help

You don't have to do this alone. There are people who can help you and / or your love one – professionals, friends, family – in a number of ways. It could range from helping with the practical stuff like cooking and cleaning to the emotional support of someone to talk to.

- Make a list of people you can involve, and how

PIVOT – a WAY to help

My friend and I decided to have a codeword, one word that we could send to each other to signal "I need help / a hug / someone who understands".

Having watched hours of Friends together, PIVOT was our choice based on a favourite scene. It turned out that just writing "PIVOT" started to make us feel a bit better.

And the more we used it, the more it worked!

What would your codeword be? Who would you use it with?

Use my codeword: email me with the subject PIVOT at coaching@fionagillies.co.uk for another pointer.

What do I know about it?

I learnt things the hard way.

When I my partner was signed off work with stress and needed additional support, I tried to keep managing everything and put myself at the bottom of my own priority list. I almost burnt out.

I've been putting my own advice into practice while helping to care for my parents-in-law. While I'm still learning and making progress, I'm in a much better position to care for them without sacrificing myself.