

# Self-care for volunteers working in Paediatric Palliative Care (PPC)

**Volunteering can bring benefits to individuals, organisations and the community. These benefits include increased self-esteem and emotional well-being, improved relationships and community connections. Volunteering can enhance a person's life by providing meaning and purpose, building a greater sense of gratitude, and improving cultural awareness.**

The PPC Family Support Volunteers uniquely support children who have a life-limiting illness by providing emotional and practical support in the home. Over time, the PPC Family Support Volunteers often build special bonds and trusting relationships with children, siblings and families. There may be other volunteers who work in Paediatric Palliative Care in the hospital and hospice/ respite facility such as biography volunteers who record and transcribe a patient's story.

Whilst rewarding, the role of a volunteer in PPC has its challenges. The role can emotionally impact volunteers who witness extremely sad events and make lasting connections with families. There is, therefore, an increased risk of developing symptoms of escalating stress, compassion fatigue or burnout. Some of these symptoms include:

- » Mental or physical exhaustion.
- » Helplessness or powerlessness.
- » A loss of interest in usually enjoyable activities.
- » Worrying or headaches.
- » Questioning personal beliefs.

**'Rest and self-care are so important. When you take time to replenish your spirit, it allows you to serve from the overflow. You cannot serve from an empty vessel'**

Eleanor Brown

**'There is both joy and pain in my role'.  
'I get more out of this role than I give'.  
'It helps me to walk and think'.**

PCC Family Support Volunteers

It is essential that PPC Family Support Volunteers care for themselves while they do this vitally important work. Some suggestions to maintain an optimal level of well-being are:

- » Exploring what is needed physically, emotionally, spiritually, and socially to remain as healthy as possible. For example, exercising, meditating, laughing or sleeping.
- » Finding nice, enjoyable or relaxing things to do.
- » Practising self-compassion and kindness.
- » Making a sustainable individual self-care plan.
- » Contacting the Volunteer Coordinators to debrief or express thoughts & emotions.
- » Being self-aware and 'checking in' with self regularly.
- » Setting physical and emotional boundaries.
- » Connecting with peers to share mutual experiences and support.
- » Noticing, pausing and self-reflecting on personal and professional experiences.
- » Developing a gratitude practice, such as journaling.
- » Consider contacting your Volunteer Coordinator for further details of counselling or other support available in your state.
- » Attending monthly volunteer meetings.
- » Considering barriers to self-care, such as being too busy or feeling selfish.

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