

RARE DADS: NAVIGATING THE CHALLENGES & BUILDING CONNECTION THROUGH

Action

This toolkit was co-developed by MGA WPA in collaboration with Give an Hour, a national nonprofit whose trauma-informed mental health frameworks informed the structure and tools included.

For more information visit GiveAnHour.org/ContactUs

Rare Dads

Male caregivers make up **39% of caregivers in the U.S.*** Despite their growing numbers, male caregivers often face unique challenges due to societal expectations and misconceptions about caregiving and masculinity. This can lead to feelings of isolation, stress, and an increased mental health burden. Understanding these challenges and knowing where to seek support is essential for maintaining both personal well-being and providing quality care.

Why Connection Matters:

- Reduces Isolation
- Improves Mental Health
- Reinforces Support Systems

Building Connection Through Action

Peer support is essential for all caregivers, but it can be particularly important for men due to the isolation and emotional strain they experience. Men often build strong connections through action, whether it's completing a project together, working on hobbies, or just being there as a support system. Michael, a rare-disease caregiver, highlights a strategy that works:

"The most powerful get-togethers come from interacting physically, face to face. The guys are just processing things differently. It's a matter of getting to a common task and achieving a small goal together—that seems to be the right time to start talking, and sometimes that talk generates itself. As men, we're dealing with the same issues, and deep down, we really want to talk about it; we just don't know where to start. If we can get there, it's much more beneficial than something you read."

Michael Deleon, UCD Rare Dad

Challenges Faced by Rare Dads

Pressure to "Fix" Everything

Men are often conditioned to solve problems, but caregiving—especially in rare disease scenarios—can involve situations beyond control. This can lead to feelings of helplessness and inadequacy when they can't fix their loved one's health issues.

Provider Stress

Many men feel the need to balance their traditional role as the provider with their caregiving duties. This often includes maintaining a full-time job while managing medical appointments and emotional support. The financial strain of caregiving can add an additional layer of stress, with nearly 45% of male caregivers reporting significant financial strain.*

Emotional Stoicism & Isolation

Societal norms discourage men from expressing vulnerability. Rare dads especially may suppress emotions to maintain a "strong front" for their families, leading to emotional isolation and an increased risk of anxiety and depression.

Stigma Around Caregiving

Many men face societal stigma, as caregiving is traditionally seen as a female role. This can make it harder for male caregivers to find the support they need, leaving them feeling alienated from caregiver networks or services designed primarily for women.

Work-life Challenges

Male caregivers often face stigma when requesting flexible schedules or time off, with caregiving duties not always taken as seriously for men. This adds stress to balancing work and caregiving, especially since 62% of male caregivers are employed full- or part-time.*



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How to Build Connections through Action

JOIN A PROJECT-BASED GROUP



Find or start a group where you work on a shared project—whether it's building something, working on cars, or even outdoor projects like gardening or home improvement. These activities create an environment to share experiences while focusing on a task.

ENGAGE IN HOBBIES TOGETHER



Hobbies like fishing, woodworking, or working out can be excellent opportunities to connect. Doing something side by side creates space to talk or simply enjoy the silence together, knowing you're there for each other.

CREATE REGULAR MEET-UPS



Schedule time with a few friends to get together for activities like hiking, biking, or any shared interest. Having a regular commitment ensures you stay connected and continue to build relationships.

TALK WHILE DOING



Men often feel more comfortable talking while doing something else. Whether it's fixing a car, playing sports, or working on a house project, these settings provide natural opportunities to share your caregiving journey.



The Benefits:

Shared Tasks Open Doors to Conversation: Starting with something small—a task, a goal—can be the key to breaking down emotional walls and starting meaningful conversations.

Active Problem Solving: When working with others, you can share strategies on balancing caregiving responsibilities, finding time for self-care, or dealing with stress.

Recharging Together: These activities allow you to step away from your caregiving role for a bit, helping you recharge mentally and emotionally.

Shared Experiences: It helps to know you're not alone. Other men may be going through similar experiences as caregivers, and working together on a project can open up conversations.

***Caregiver statistics are based on data from the AARP and National Alliance for Caregiving (NAC) 2020 report on caregiving in the U.S.**