Ask the Doctor: Autism & Mental Health
A Focus on Caregivers

Presenters: Dr. Shivajan Sivapalan
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Autism ONTARIO

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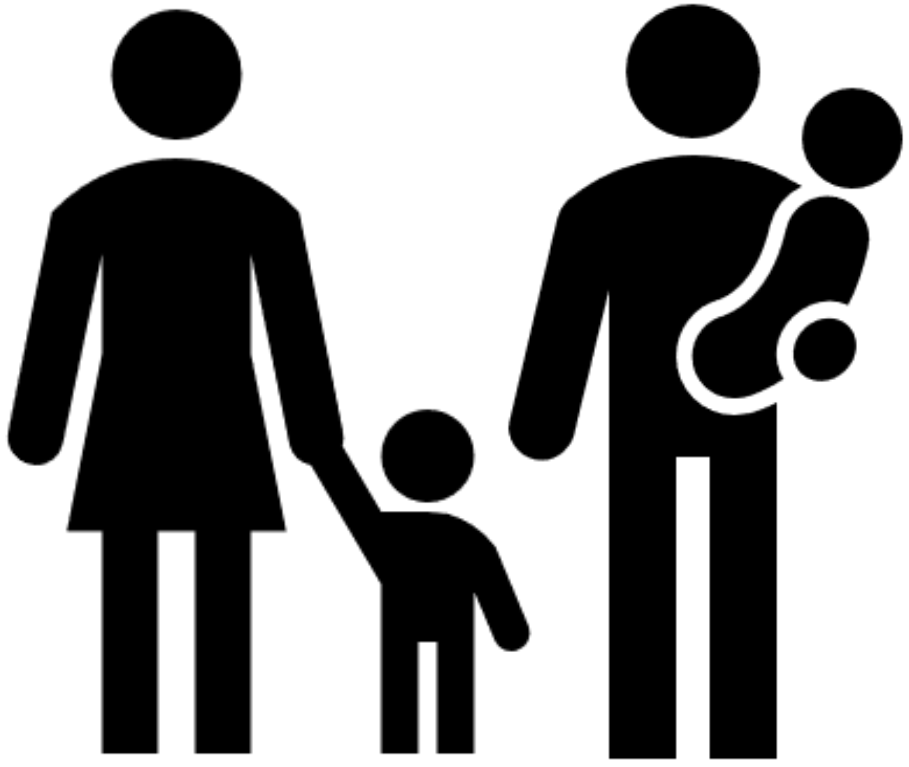
You can’t pour from an empty cup

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Why support caregivers?

- Caregivers of children with ASD report elevated stress and social isolation (Davis & Carter, 2008; Olsson & Hwang, 2008)

- Existing programming does not systematically address parental functioning (Drew et al., 2002; McConachie & Diggle, 2007)

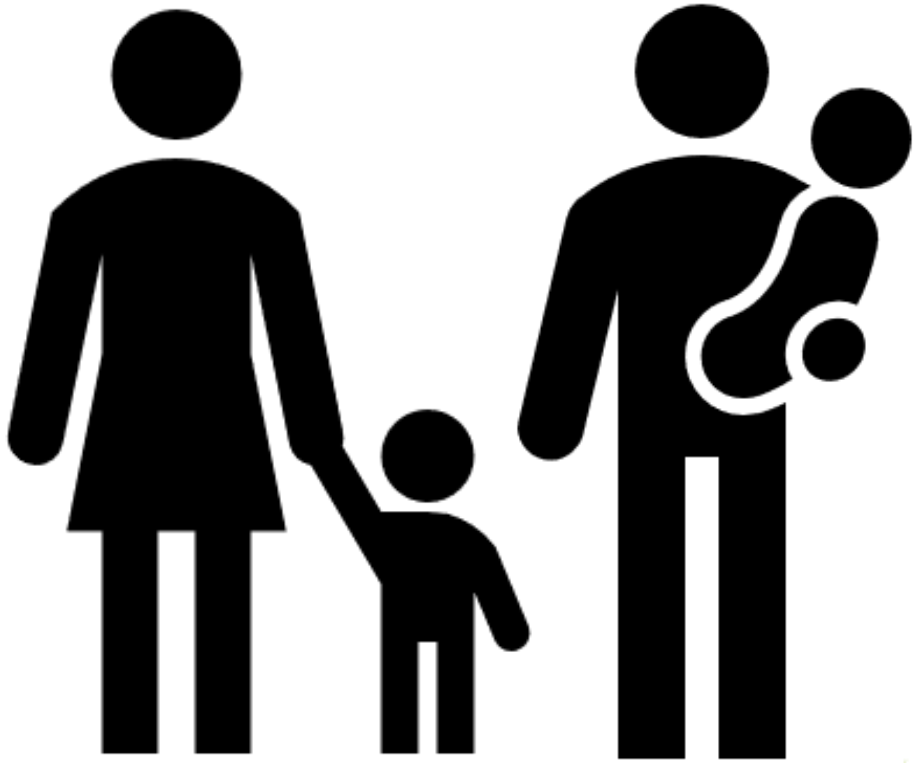


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Why support caregivers?

- Caregivers are increasingly responsible for implementing early intervention with their children (Jellett, Wood, Giallo, & Seymour, 2015)

- Interventions targeting caregiver mental health can increase capacity to manage their children's behaviour and positively impact the overall family system (Jellett, Wood, Giallo, & Seymour, 2015)



What are the barriers to accessing mental health supports?



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CORONAVIRUS | News

COVID-19 pandemic taking harder toll on parents, families taking care of children living with autism

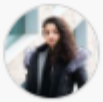


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STAR EXCLUSIVE

Who's caring for the caregivers? Many under massive stress looking after ailing loved ones during the pandemic

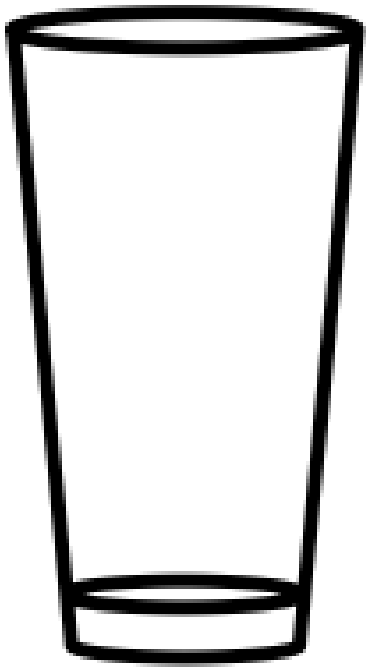


By Nadine Yousif Local Journalism Initiative Reporter
Wed., Dec. 9, 2020 | 4 min. read

July 29, 2020

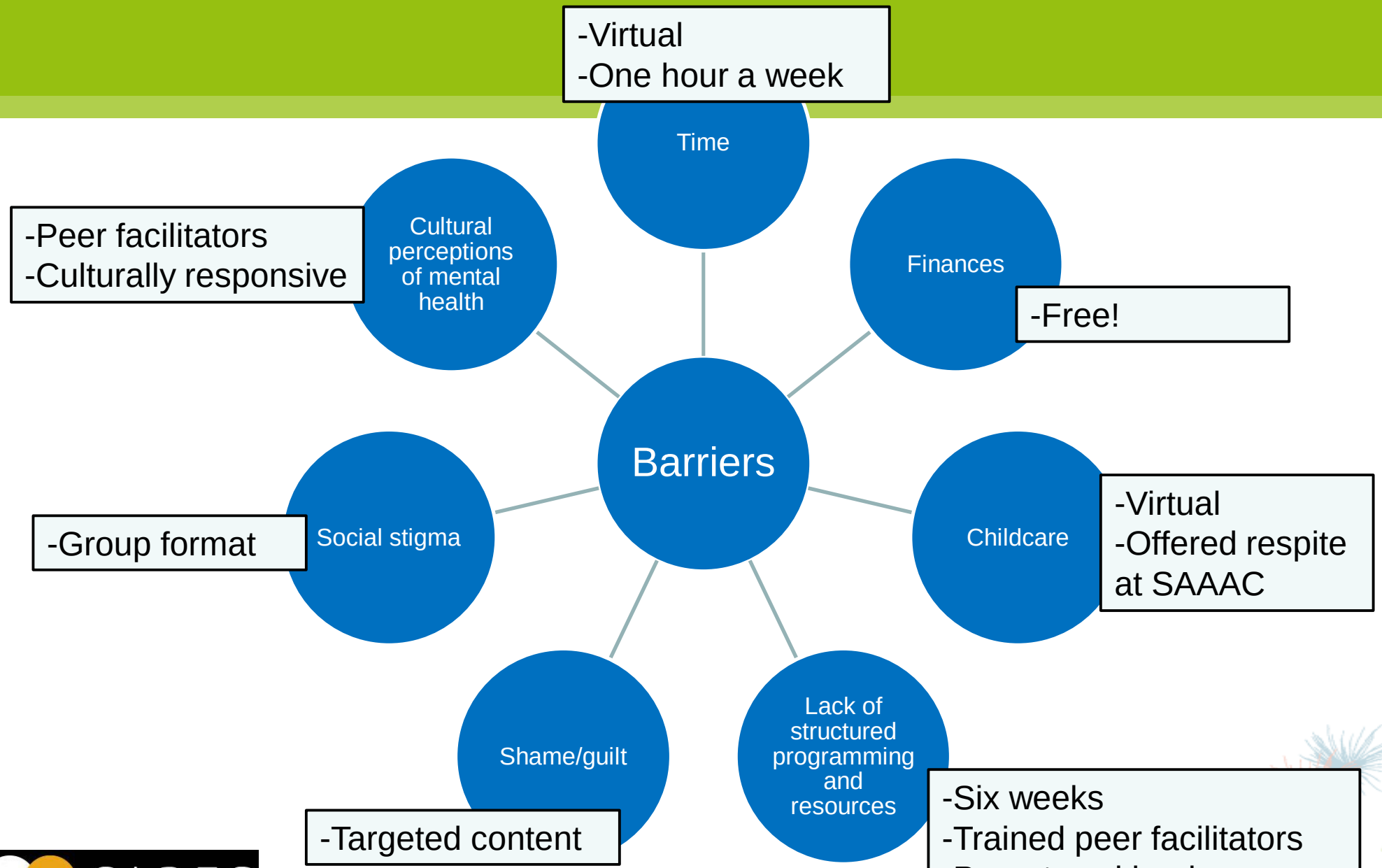
Pandemic contributes to burnout in caregivers of children on autism spectrum

Study explores how vulnerable populations are disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic



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Family.
Community.
& Autism.
Supporting caregivers,
empowering families.
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-Virtual
-One hour a week
Time
-Peer facilitators
-Culturally responsive
Cultural perceptions of mental health
Finances
-Free!
Barriers
-Group format
Social stigma
Childcare
-Virtual
-Offered respite at SAAAC
Shame/guilt
-Targeted content
Lack of structured programming and resources
-Six weeks
-Trained peer facilitators
-Parent workbook

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What do caregivers learn about?



STRESS AND STRESS MANAGEMENT



HEALTHY THINKING//REWRITING OUR STORIES



PROBLEM SOLVING

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What is self-compassion?

- When you are having a difficult time, you are able to:
  - recognize your distress and sit with your negative feelings without being overwhelmed by them or judging them; and
  - take a caring, comforting perspective towards yourself the same way you would for a friend



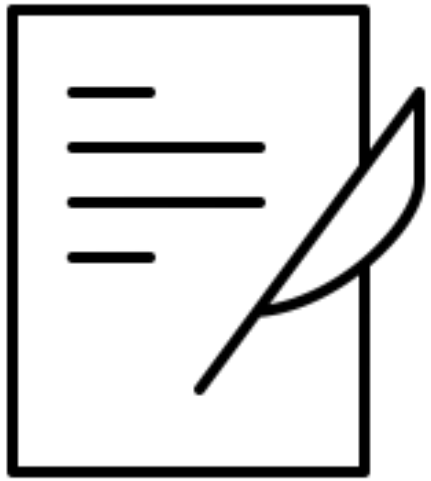
- It's not about "lowering your standards" or "giving up"

- Though self-compassion can involve being kind to yourself, it's not always soft or gentle – it also means taking action to do what is most helpful even when it's hard

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Why and how do we practice self-compassion?

- Research suggests being more self-compassionate allows people to cope better with negative experiences, and actually increases motivation (Breines & Chen, 2012; Neff, Kirkpatrick, & Rude, 2007)
- It can also strengthen our relationships with others (Akin & Akin, 2015; Neff & Beretvas, 2013)
- Self-compassion is a skill that you can build and strengthen over time
  - Self-compassionate letter-writing activity



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Why is flexibility crucial in caregiver support programs?





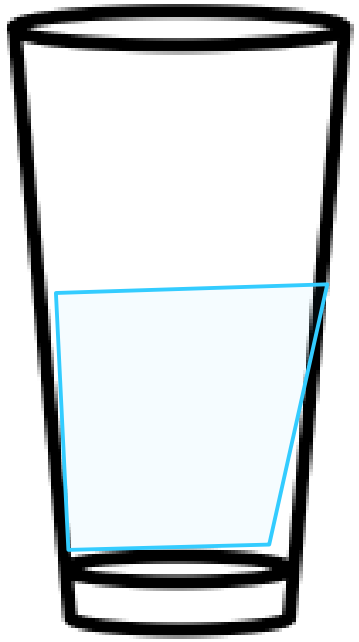
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What do we want caregivers to gain?

1. Shared experiences and identity
2. Knowledge and skills to support own mental health

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