

# FOSTERING RESILIENCE THROUGH WELLNESS PRACTICES

EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE  
TIPS AND RESOURCES



# SECTION 1



CONVERSATION  
STARTERS

## Conversation Starters

# DIET, EXERCISE & HEALTHY BEHAVIORS



*“We used to love to hike on the weekends but now my fatigue and balance problems make it incredibly difficult.”*

## Conversations with Family and Friends:

*“I really miss our hikes together and I know you miss them too. Maybe we could learn a different way to hike together or we could try something else that would feel safer and less tiring for me.”*

*“I’ve gained a lot of weight since I stopped being able to exercise as much as I used to. Could we look at some ways to change our diet that might help me manage my weight better?”*

*“I know my MS symptoms are causing both of us to lose a lot of sleep. Maybe the neurologist can suggest some strategies that would help us both get more sleep.”*

## Conversations with Your Partner with MS:

*“I’ve gained some weight and want to start exercising but I’m not sure how to fit it in. I would really like to brainstorm some ideas with you.”*

*“I’ve noticed your walking is more unsteady and I’ve seen some bruises on your legs so I’m worried how much you might be falling. I’d really like to talk about how to help you be as safe as possible especially when you’re home alone.”*

*“Since we’ve been eating more take out, my blood sugars have gotten much higher. Let’s take some time this weekend to come up with a plan for making some changes.”*

## Conversations with Healthcare Professionals:

*“I used to be so physically active but now with my leg weakness and balance problems, it’s exhausting and unsafe. Plus, my husband and kids are starting to worry. Can you refer me to someone who could evaluate me and help me come up with a way to stay active with my family?”*

Conversation Starters

# RELATIONSHIPS



***“My family’s complaining that I’m always in a lousy mood.”***

*Conversations with Family and Friends:*

***“My mood is not so good and I feel bad that I’m yelling at the kids. The looks they give me just break my heart.” Do I seem depressed to you? I guess I should talk with the neurologist about it but I’m embarrassed.”***

***“We used to work as a team but lately it has felt like we’re rarely on the same page.”***

***“A friend mentioned that she and her husband started having a family meeting once a week to go over schedules and plan activities. Would you be willing to try that with me?”***

*Conversations with Your Partner with MS:*

***“By the time I get home from work, I’m really stressed out and I don’t want to take it out on you. Maybe we could build in a few minutes of down time for me after work?”***

***“We used to be able to talk about anything but we haven’t much talking for awhile. I miss you.”***

***“I know you’ve said you don’t want to tell anyone about your MS but it’s awkward and uncomfortable with family and friends.” Maybe we could figure out a compromise that works for both of us?”***

*Conversations with Healthcare Professionals:*

***“My wife and I are butting heads more and more and talking less and less. Can you refer us to someone who has MS experience who can help us work on our relationship?”***

Conversation Starters

# WORK AND HOME



***“Lately our household has felt chaotic and out of control.”***

## *Conversations with Family and Friends:*

***“With working full-time and driving the kids to practices, I don’t feel like I’m getting anything done at home. I feel bad we’re eating lots of takeout and I can’t keep up with the laundry.” Can we talk about ways to share some of the tasks?”***

***“I don’t know about you but our lives feel really out of control these days.”***

***“I’m not sure I can keep working full-time but our health insurance is through my job. I’m overwhelmed and don’t know what to do. I think we need to talk with a financial planner about what our options might be.”***

## *Conversations with Your Partner with MS:*

***“There’s got to be a better way to get things done around here. Let’s put our heads together and come up with a plan.”***

***“I see you going 24-7 and I worry about how that’s affecting your MS. It’s not easy to bring this up when you don’t talk about it.”***

## *Conversations with Healthcare Professionals:*

***“Our household is totally out of control and I’m exhausting myself trying to keep up. I’ve heard occupational therapists can be helpful with organization and energy conserving strategies. Can you refer me to someone like that?”***

Conversation Starters

# EMOTIONAL WELLNESS



*“Everything feels  
overwhelming and  
painfully bleak to me.”*

## *Conversations with Family and Friends:*

*“I’ve felt so down and discouraged for the past few weeks. I don’t seem to be able to pull myself out of it like I did before and that’s scaring me. I really need to feel like you’re in my corner as I try to deal with this.”*

*“When I get into bed at night, I start thinking, my mind fills up with anxiety and I can’t fall asleep. Then I worry about being more fatigued the next day. It’s a vicious cycle and I don’t know how to break out of it. You know me so well – do you have any suggestions?”*

## *Conversations with Your Partner with MS:*

*“You seem so sad and I want to help but I don’t know what to do.”*

*“You seem to be adjusting pretty well to MS but I can’t stop thinking about our future. I’ve even had some panic attacks this week.”*

## *Conversations with Healthcare Professionals:*

*“My mood has been so bad for the past month and it’s more than feeling sad about changes related to my MS. I want to see someone who could evaluate my mood and recommend treatment that might help.”*

Conversation Starters

# SPIRITUAL WELLNESS



*"I feel like I've lost my sense of purpose and identity."*

## Conversations with Family and Friends:

*"I'm feeling pretty disconnected from who I've been all my life. Could you help me get back in touch with the parts of me that have nothing to do with MS?"*

*"I've always had goals and plans but now that my MS seems to be getting worse, I wonder if I should just give up on planning for the future – but I know that wouldn't be fair to you. Maybe we could talk together about our plans and that would help."*

## Conversations with Your Partner with MS:

*"I've noticed you've stopped doing some of the things that have always been important to you and I'd like to know why."*

*"Maybe your MS is the kick in the butt we've needed to step back and think about our future?"*

*"We seem to be on different planets lately. Maybe there's something we could come up with to do together?"*

*"We seem to be busy all the time, it would be nice to carve out some time to relax and just be together."*

## Conversations with Healthcare Professionals:

*"I've lost my confidence and my sense of purpose. Could you refer me to a therapist or spiritual counselor who might be able to help me work through this?"*

Conversation Starters

# INTELLECTUAL WELLNESS



*“Conversations have become so difficult that we seem to have given up.”*

*Conversations with Family and Friends:*

*“I got lost this morning driving the kids to school and they got mad because they didn’t want to be late. This really scared me. Have you noticed me being confused or forgetting things lately?”*

*“When we’re out with friends, I can’t keep up with the conversation so I don’t enjoy it. Could we talk about socializing with one or two couples at a time so I don’t feel so lost.”*

*“I know you get impatient when I can’t remember things – but your frustration just makes it harder for me. Maybe we could get a referral to a psychologist or speech/language pathologist who could give us some tips on how to make our conversations more successful.”*

*Conversations with Your Partner with MS:*

*“When you have trouble coming up with what you want to say, I try to help by making suggestions. Then you look annoyed so I don’t know what to do.”*

*“I remind you of things when I’m leaving in the morning but then they don’t get done. Can you help me understand what’s going on? This is so unlike you.”*

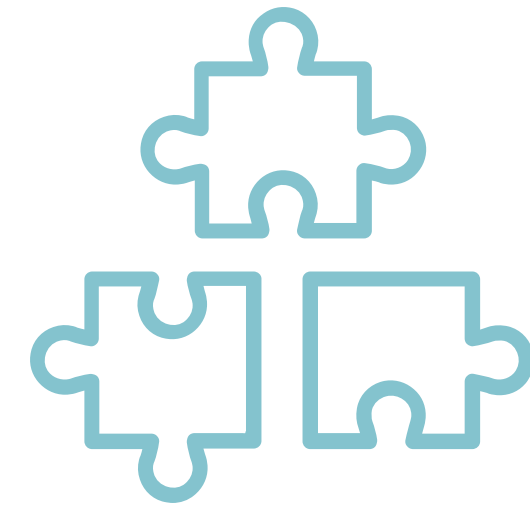
*“You always did such a great job keeping track of our crazy schedules but recently we missed a couple of appointments and the kids missed out on the school trip because their permission slips weren’t in on time. Please let me know how I can help with this.”*

*Conversations with Healthcare Professionals:*

*“My concentration and memory problems are really affecting my family life and my work. As a first step, I would like to be screened for cognitive changes to find out what exactly is going on.”*



# SECTION 2



STEPS FOR  
PROACTIVE  
PROBLEM-SOLVING

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## Steps for Proactive Problem Solving

### DIET, EXERCISE & HEALTHY BEHAVIORS

*“We used to love to hike on the weekends but now my fatigue and balance problems make it incredibly difficult.”*

- Use the conversation starters to help you share your thoughts and feelings with one another.
- Talk with your healthcare provider about the symptoms you find most challenging and request referrals to the appropriate members of the healthcare team (e.g., an occupational therapist for fatigue management strategies and a physical therapist to help you with balance issues.)
- Talk with the physical therapist about:
  - *Tools or strategies you could use to make hiking safer and more comfortable.*
  - *Other types of physical activities that the two of you might find enjoyable.*
  - *Adaptive sports or recreational activities that are available in your area.*
- Be willing to do things differently than you have in the past
- Try out one or more of the options and then share your reactions about them
- If you don't like the first one or two things you try, try more!

## Steps for Proactive Problem Solving

### RELATIONSHIPS

*“My family's complaining that I'm always in a lousy mood.”*

- Use the conversation starters to facilitate communication about your moods.
- Ask for specific examples and see whether you can identify any specific triggers for your moodiness.
- Take a look at information on the Can Do MS website ([cando-ms.org](http://cando-ms.org)) about the relationship between MS and mood changes.
- Talk with your healthcare provider and request a screening for depression and an evaluation of your mood.
- If treatment is recommended (talk therapy and/or medication), follow through with the recommendations for at least 3 months to see whether you and your family see a change in your mood.
- Explain the treatment recommendations to your family and ask for their support while you work on feeling better.

## Steps for Proactive Problem Solving

### WORK AND HOME

*“Lately our household has felt chaotic and out of control.”*

- Use the conversation starters to help you and your partners identify changes in the household that are leading to more feelings of chaos.
- Make a list of specific problems you would like to address.
- Ask your healthcare provider for a referral to an occupational therapist who can help you with task and time management, and organization strategies for your home.
- If MS-related cognitive issues are contributing to the chaos (e.g., memory problems, challenges with planning, prioritizing, problem-solving, attention problems), request a referral to a speech/language pathologist or neuropsychologist who can identify the problems and recommend compensatory and organizational strategies to help with household management.
- Share the recommendations with your family members and ask for their cooperation with household organization (reducing clutter; keeping things like glasses, keys, TV remote in consistent place) and household chores.
- Evaluate the situation after a couple of weeks to determine whether the strategies have reduced the feeling of chaos. If not, talk about what you and your family could do to improve the situation further.

## Steps for Proactive Problem Solving


### EMOTIONAL WELLNESS

*“Everything feels overwhelming and painfully bleak to me.”*

- Ask yourself how long you have been feeling this way and whether there have been any specific events or triggers that seem to have contributed to your feelings.
- Talk to your healthcare provider about your mood and request a screening for depression.
- Request a referral to a mental health professional who is familiar with MS and the relationship between MS and depression.
- Follow through with the treatment recommendations that are made (e.g., talk therapy and/or medication). Remember that exercise geared to your level of ability has also been shown to elevate mood.
- Work with the mental health provider to evaluate your progress. The goal in treatment is not just to feel less depressed; the goal is for the depression to be cured so that you feel like yourself again.
- Evaluate your support system and ask family and friends to understand and support you while you work to feel better.

## Steps for Proactive Problem Solving

### SPIRITUAL WELLNESS




*“I feel like I’ve lost my sense of purpose and identity.”*

- Remember that the changes and losses that occur with MS may threaten a person’s sense of self, self-confidence, and personal identity.
- Make a list of the roles, activities, and relationships in your life that have contributed to your sense of purpose, connection, and identity, and think about how MS may have impacted them.
- Make a list of the things that continue to be important to you and give your life meaning. Are you giving time and energy to those valued things?
- Consider talking with your spiritual advisor or a mental health professional about ways to reconnect with the things that matter to you most – e.g., relationships, nature, your spiritual beliefs, or anything else that you value.
- Consider the possibility that depression or other mood changes may be contributing to the change in your feelings – and request a depression screen if you think your mood has recently changed.
- Reach out to family and friends for support – and ask them to help you remember and reconnect with the parts of you that have nothing to do with MS.

## Steps for Proactive Problem Solving

### INTELLECTUAL WELLNESS



*“Conversations have become so difficult that we seem to have given up.”*

- Use the conversation starters (during a relaxed moment) to begin talking about what the problem seems to be.
- Make a list of the things that seem to be making conversations so difficult (e.g., no good time, too much tension or conflict, MS-related memory or attention problems, concern about upsetting or worrying the other person, embarrassment, depression).
- Check out the Can Do MS website ([CanDo-ms.org](http://CanDo-ms.org)) for webinars on common communication challenges and strategies for dealing with them.
- If depression or anxiety seem to be a contributing factor, talk to your healthcare provider about a referral to a mental health provider for an evaluation.
- If cognitive issues seem to be contributing, talk with your healthcare provider about a referral to a neuropsychologist or speech/language pathologist for an evaluation and recommendations.
- If tension or conflict seem to be the primary challenge, request a referral to a mental health professional who can help you talk more comfortably with one another about your feelings and issues.



# SECTION 3

## HELPFUL RESOURCES

Pathways to Wellness in MS (Website)

[VISIT WEBSITE](#)

Wellness Discussion Guide for People with MS and Their Healthcare Providers (Brochure)

[READ NOW](#)

Landing on Your Feet When Your World is Turned Upside Down (Webinar)

[WATCH NOW](#)

Resilience: Addressing the Challenges of MS (Book)

[READ NOW](#)

Cognitive Changes in MS: Current Recommendations (Brochure)

[READ NOW](#)

MS Path 2 Care: Home, Work, Relationships (Webinar)

[WATCH NOW](#)

Integrative Nutrition (Webinar)

[WATCH NOW](#)

Secondary Progressive MS: How to Maintain Your Physical Wellbeing (Webinar)

[WATCH NOW](#)

How to Choose the Mobility Device That's Right For You (Brochure)

[READ NOW](#)

Employment Challenges (Webinar)

[WATCH NOW](#)

Applying for Social Security Benefits (Brochure)

[READ NOW](#)

Understanding Your Healthcare Team (Handout)

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