



# EMOTIONAL SUPPORT TOOLKIT

STEPS FOR OPTIMIZING  
EMOTIONAL SUPPORT, PHYSICAL  
CAREGIVING, AND ASSISTANCE  
WITH EVERYDAY NEEDS





## REAL IMPACT

### STEPS YOU CAN DO TO OPTIMIZE EMOTIONAL WELLBEING FOR YOURSELF AND YOUR PARTNERSHIP

The emotional wellbeing of each partner in a relationship is essential to the health of the partnership. Learning to recognize, acknowledge, and communicate your own feelings while listening to the needs of your partner are important STEPS toward giving and receiving support.





*Person with MS*

## STEP 1

Recognize and acknowledge that MS is “we disease” not a “me disease.” Although you are living with the diagnosis and symptoms of MS, your support partner is also living with, and affected by, this unpredictable, chronic illness, including losses, changes, and adaptations.

*Support Partner*

## STEP 1

Along with feelings of love and commitment, support partners often experience feelings of fatigue, anxiety, guilt, resentment, isolation, loneliness, hopelessness, and/or frustration. The first step to getting the emotional support you need is to examine your own feelings, acknowledge, and respect them.





## Person with MS

# STEP 2

The next step is to allow yourself to hear your support partner's reactions, feelings, needs without feeling guilty or reacting defensively. Choose a relaxed time (not during an argument) and place for these important conversations with your partner.

***Plan a conversation starter that you think will resonate with your partner:***

*"I may be the one diagnosed with MS, but I know you're living with it too. Could we talk about how you feel about MS?"*

*"I'm worried about how you're doing with all this. Maybe if we did some planning for the future, we'd both feel less anxious about it."*

*"I know that you've been taking on more and more of the responsibilities around here. I'd like to talk with you about ways I could take some of the weight off your shoulders so you can have some time for yourself."*

*"I appreciate all the things you do for me but I want to take care of you as well – how can I help you more?"*

*"I know you worry about my safety. If you'll try not to hover so much, I'll try to do a better job of letting you know how I feel and when I need your help."*

*"I sometimes think that we take out our anger about MS on each other. Let's talk about some ways we could redirect that anger where it belongs."*

## Support Partner

# STEP 2

The next step is to allow yourself to share those feelings in a caring and respectful way. Choose a relaxed time (not during an argument) and a place for these important conversations with your partner.

***Plan a conversation starter that you think will resonate with your partner:***

*"I'd like to talk with you about some difficult feelings I've been experiencing. I'm sure you're having some of those as well and perhaps we can help each other."*

*"I'd really like to talk about how we can begin planning for the future. It all feels very unpredictable and that is making me anxious. I think talking through the possibilities would help me a lot."*

*"I've been feeling really exhausted lately and I'm hoping we can talk about that a bit. My responsibilities at work and home are feeling overwhelming and I need to come up with some ways to manage them better."*

*"I have so many feelings bouncing around in my head and I feel guilty about all of them. One thing I'd like to ask is for you to help me figure out how to have some down time for me."*

*"I sometimes think that we take out our anger about MS on each other. Let's talk about some ways we could redirect that anger where it belongs."*



*Person with MS + Support Partner*

## STEP 3

Talk with your partner about strategies the two of you could use to ensure that you both get the emotional support you need.

- Identify strategies that feel best for you individually and for your relationship:
  - **Scheduled time together and time alone**
  - **Date nights**
  - **Acknowledgement of what each brings to the relationship**
  - **Expressions of appreciation and gratitude**
- Try out your strategies for a period of time
- Check in with each other on a regular basis to evaluate the success of the strategies you are using.







*Person with MS + Support Partner*

## STEP 4

If the strategies don't appear to be working or your communication seems to falter, a counselor or therapist can help you find solutions.

Helpful Websites:

- **Can Do Multiple Sclerosis ([cando-ms.org](http://cando-ms.org))** – find multidisciplinary webinars, podcasts, online learning opportunities, library articles, and a wide array of virtual wellness program options.
- **National MS Society (1-800-344-4867)** – speak to a National MS Society MS Navigator for support, information, referrals.
- **Findempathie.com** – find a mental health professional who specializes in MS.
- **HelpPro.com** – find a mental health professional.





# A STEP TOOLKIT

[CANDO-MS.ORG](http://CANDO-MS.ORG)