



CARING
ACROSS
GENERATIONS

Care is Everywhere:

A Guide to Making Caregiving More Visible On Screen





Caring for others is one of the most fundamentally human things we do. But people who are providing care in the United States, especially those caring for older adults, don't feel valued by our society.

It's time to change how our culture SHOWS care to help shift how our society VALUES care.

After all, this is an issue that affects all of us. We all need care at different points in our lives:

- ◆ Children need care
- ◆ People of all ages with disabilities need care
- ◆ People recovering from injury or illness need care
- ◆ People with chronic conditions need care
- ◆ All of us need care as we age



Care is Everywhere

Caregiving manifests in a lot of ways. It's preparing meals for someone or providing transportation, managing medications or services, or giving financial support. It can look like lifting someone into or out of a wheelchair, helping them bathe, or simply offering companionship. And much more.

Whatever form it takes, caregiving is an ongoing commitment of time and effort from caregivers. Caregivers can be paid care workers, but also family members, friends and other loved ones, like neighbors or community members. But lack of affordable support and resources makes it difficult for many families to meet the needs of their loved ones while also paying the bills.

53 million Americans are providing unpaid care to an adult loved one.

Caregiving is embedded in our lives, but not visible in our culture. As a result, caregivers feel isolated. The lack of visibility also reinforces the harmful narrative that providing care is not valuable labor. When in fact, care is the work that makes all other work possible.



The Narrative Shift

We want to see film and TV content that acknowledges the very real labor of millions of caregivers and that moves us toward seeing care as a universal social issue, deserving of public solutions that take the burden off of individuals and families.

*Care is invisible and undervalued →
Care is valuable and important work*

*Caregiving is an individual responsibility →
Caregiving is a collective responsibility*

USE

“caregiver” instead of “caretaker”

“older adult” instead of “senior”

“aging” instead of “elderly”



Best Practices

DO: show more acts of care happening in homes, community settings, and intergenerational spaces.

DON'T: default to showing care only in the context of an institution.

- ◆ Most older Americans and people with disabilities prefer to receive care at home.
- ◆ Communities of color, especially, are more likely to prioritize caring for older adults at home.

DO: give visibility and dialogue to characters providing care, including domestic workers (i.e. nannies, housekeepers, or care workers), and especially women of color.

DON'T: keep caregivers invisible or in the background, even when centering someone who has a disability or is aging – make space for the whole care team.

- ◆ Care is not something that “just happens” – make the work visible, whether it’s done by relatives, chosen family or care workers.
- ◆ Black and brown women make up more than half of the domestic workforce in the U.S. but only a quarter of the domestic worker characters on TV.

DO: show characters receiving care being included in decision-making about their care.

DON'T: weaponize care solely to fuel drama among characters who are not receiving the care.

- ◆ Needing care does not negate a person’s agency or dignity.
- ◆ Rather, quality care and support empowers older adults and people with disabilities to enjoy rich, fulfilling, and autonomous lives.

DO: show that caregiving can be a source of satisfaction, joy, and fulfillment even when it’s tough. People WANT to take care of their loved ones.

DON'T: only show care as a burden or overlook the systemic factors that make it more difficult.

- ◆ Worker shortages and long wait lists mean families may not have access to home-based care, even when they qualify for it.
- ◆ Meanwhile, only 23% of U.S. workers receive paid family leave through their jobs.

CARE



Best Practices (Cont.)

DO: dramatize the paradoxes that people, especially women, face in balancing work with caregiving,

DON'T: exalt the “heroic” woman who “does it all” – i.e. working while caring for children and (invisibly) her parents or other adult loved ones.

- ◆ 3.5 million women left the workforce due to the Covid-19 pandemic. An estimated 1.1 million still haven't returned, largely due to lack of care options.
- ◆ Many caregivers develop and / or deprioritize their own health concerns while juggling care and other responsibilities without access to supportive resources.

DO: consider portraying lead characters as caregivers, and building main storylines around caregiving.

DON'T: render caregivers one-dimensional: make them complex characters with rich backstories.

- ◆ Many care journeys are long and constantly evolve over a number of years.
- ◆ Series content is particularly well-suited to reflect the ongoing, continual experience of caregiving and receiving.

DO: Imagine new realities in which care happens. Use genre to explore new possibilities for care.

- ◆ We want to envision a world in which care happens where people live, among their families and communities, and where access to care is equitable and abundant.



PLEASE DO: show the intersections of care with other identities including ethnic, racial, class, gender, ability, and more:

- ◆ Black and Latinx caregivers spend more time per week caregiving than white counterparts.
- ◆ Caregivers of color are more likely to be younger than white caregivers.
- ◆ Younger caregivers are more likely to be financially insecure.
- ◆ Male caregivers are more likely to feel isolated and to keep caregiving responsibilities a secret.
- ◆ Women are more likely to sacrifice jobs and income to provide care.
- ◆ LGBTQIA+ identifying people may rely more on community care.

DEFINITELY DON'T: reinforce the trope of criminal caregiver. Avoid these harmful stereotypes:

- ◆ Elder abuse, while real and horrific when it happens, is overrepresented in the media.
- ◆ In-home care workers who steal are much more common on-screen than in the real world.



We Want To See...

- ◆ Visible acts of caregiving at all stages of life
- ◆ Care teamwork between family members and professional care workers (aka “care squads”)
- ◆ Men providing care, whether as family members, friends, or paid care workers
- ◆ Collective/community care occurring within friend groups or LGBTQIA+ chosen families
- ◆ Characters openly planning for and /or navigating the logistics and costs of long-term care
- ◆ More range in the types of challenges faced when providing care
- ◆ Nuanced depictions of caregiving that balance the challenges with the humor and joy involved
- ◆ Stories exploring role reversals and other dynamics common to family caregiving situations
- ◆ Intergenerational living, where care happens organically between family members
- ◆ Care recipients (e.g. older adults, disabled characters) who also provide care to others
- ◆ Characters with care needs that are invisible (e.g. chronic illness, invisible disability)
- ◆ Care workers who are fully dimensional characters – with dialogue!
- ◆ Older adult characters written with complexity and who display agency





Key Terms + Facts

Family Caregiver

Someone who provides care in any capacity (physical, emotional, financial, etc.) to a family member, partner, or friend. Almost always unpaid.

FACT: On average, family caregivers provide 23.7 hours of care per week.

Sandwich Generation Caregiver

Someone who is providing unpaid care for adult members of their family (i.e. parents or siblings) while also raising their own children.

FACT: There are currently 11 million Sandwich Generation caregivers in the U.S.

Home + Community Care

Care delivered in the home or community as opposed to an institution.

FACT: The overwhelming majority (88%) of Americans want to age at home

Care Worker

A skilled professional hired to care for someone, in a family home or institutional setting.

FACT: 61% of care workers are people of color, 87% are women, and 23.5% are immigrants.

Long-Term Care

Care that extends over a long period of time, including supports and services for aging adults and people with disabilities.

FACT: Due to the prohibitive cost of long-term care insurance and lack of sufficient public systems, many Americans who have long-term care needs rely on unpaid support from family and friends.

Collective Care

Sharing the responsibilities of caring for each other within a group or community.

FACT: Black Americans are most likely to see care as a community activity + responsibility.

Care Squad / Care Team

The multiple people working together to support an individual's care. Can include family caregivers alongside care workers.

FACT: 1 in 5 Americans are caring for an adult loved one.

Care As Social Justice

The devaluing of care is a direct result of outdated sexist, racist, and individualistic beliefs that pigeonholed caregiving as the domestic work of women, rendering it invisible and undervalued. When done by paid professionals, care work has fallen primarily to immigrant women and women of color, making it even less of a priority within our society and policies.

Put another way, changing how we value care also moves us closer to a more equitable society.

***CARE JUSTICE = GENDER JUSTICE =
RACIAL JUSTICE = ECONOMIC JUSTICE
= SOCIAL JUSTICE.***



Caring Across Generations is a national nonprofit organization bringing together caregiving families, older adults, people with disabilities and care workers to transform how we give and receive care in the US. We are on a mission to visibilize and amplify people's experiences as we all cope with our increased and interconnected caregiving needs and responsibilities.

We all have care in common.

For additional information, story guidance, and in-room consultations, please contact:

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