Mindfulness-Based Dementia Care (MBDC) is a program designed to reduce caregiver stress and enhance wellbeing, skill and resilience. Offering new and reinforcing practices, MBDC creates a reliable pathway for a sustained healthy, safe, connected and resilient approach to caring for someone with dementia.

REBECCA & JOHN

Meet Rebecca & John. They have been married for 40 years. Rebecca is an emerging care partner.

They have been happily married, but it has been challenging lately. Rebecca and John are struggling right now.

John has not been himself and unable to do the things he used to do independently and competently. They’re scared.

FACING CHANGE

John has been misplacing important papers and bills. While not entirely aware of the scope of the problem, he feels terrible and incompetent to help.

Rebecca is doing her best to keep things organized, and is worried; John was always so good at these things! Rebecca feels guilty about not being more patient with John.
SEEKING HELP

After an appointment with a neurologist and additional testing, Rebecca and John learn that he has Amnestic Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI). It is probably caused by Alzheimer’s Disease, and will likely progress to dementia.

His sister and his mother both had Alzheimer’s Disease. Rebecca and John are devastated. They know what the disease progression will look like and shudder at the painful memories of that time.

JUST THE TWO OF US

John & Rebecca used to be very outgoing socially, but find they now spend a lot of time alone. It’s uncomfortable to go out with others, because they can tell that friends are starting to notice something is wrong. John insists on not sharing his diagnosis. He has a hard time coming to terms with it himself and struggles to hold on to normal life as it is.

Rebecca feels isolated. She can’t talk to anyone about this, except John. She notices that she is becoming less patient and has a hard time sleeping.
LONELINESS

During a rare night out, their friends notice something is terribly wrong, but are uncomfortable broaching the subject. Rebecca has been defensive about John in the past. They don’t know how to help.

Hoping for a fun evening, it’s awkward for everyone. Rebecca feels especially lonely while in the company of others. John senses something is going on and feels uncomfortable. He wants to go home early.

Rebecca calls her friend the next day to apologize. She ends up sharing John’s diagnosis, and is surprised at how helpful and supportive her friend is, even if she doesn’t share the same experience personally. Her friend encourages her to do some research about dementia caregiving, and to take better care of herself.
LEARNING to STOP

Rebecca knows this is important advice. She remembers seeing her own mother’s health decline while caring for her father. So, she does an internet search, and something catches her eye:

**S.T.O.P.**

Stop (what you’re doing)

Take a breath (notice sensation of breathing)

Observe (what is going on?)

Proceed (with more awareness on what is needed)

It is a part of a class on Mindfulness Based Dementia Care (MBDC). It’s supposed to help reduce caregiver stress and teach skills to use in the dementia care exchange. Rebecca decides to sign up. The class comes with access to an online community, videos, workbook and live sessions too!
During the first session, Rebecca participates in a brief, guided meditation.

She is so surprised by how much better she feels after just five minutes of focusing on breathing, she ends up doing it four more times that day!

Rebecca not only enjoys this simple practice, she looks forward to it and, after a few days, she finds she can now ‘play it in her head’.

Rebecca learns about how stress affects the body and mind, and how she can affect John with the way she approaches him.

After a few MBDC sessions, Rebecca decides to join other caregivers on the MBDC forum.

She learns about so-called micro practices and everyday mindfulness, and realizes she can apply her mindfulness practice to any interaction with John. Rebecca begins with the first one she learned, S.T.O.P.
APPLIED LEARNING

Rebecca notices how tightly wound she has become, how often her jaw is clenched and shoulders are drawn.

After some time, she is able to relax more often Rebecca becomes more hopeful and confident.

She begins to learn how her grief and worry have affected her and becomes more aware of how her body tenses up when she is triggered.

Rebecca notices how many opportunities there actually are to apply simple practices, like S.T.O.P.

She feels confident in being able to restore her wellbeing, even when, especially when, helping John. She realizes that in doing so, she is actually able to protect his wellbeing too!

RESTORATIVE COMMUNICATION

Rebecca notices that it is actually not very often they need to hurry at all, for instance, and there are many ways to prevent these anxious moments.

Instead, she finds there is so much she can control, in a relaxed way. She finds ways John can also, independently, navigate what comes next. Simple strategies help her be able to pause and respond, while preserving and restoring their communication, making stress more manageable.
BEING TOGETHER

After some time, Rebecca’s increasingly sustained and applied mindfulness practice helps her constantly attune and adjust to John’s reality. She learns from him, and is better able to see him as more whole, rather than just focusing on his deficits.

Rebecca learns to plan so there is more space for John’s new way of experiencing the world. She goes from a task-driven mindset to prioritizing their connection in the moment. She notices this benefits her too!

More often than not, they are able to simply enjoy a moment. Nowadays, John’s slowed walking pace is no longer a source of irritation for Rebecca, but rather an invitation to practice mindful walking, take in sensations and be aware of their love and connection.

Rebecca set out to learn about dementia care and, in doing so, she discovered - at a level she had never appreciated before - her ability to partner with John, his dementia, and their shared journey in ways that were aware, connected, patient, loving, and flexible. The community she needed was right there - Rebecca needed to learn how to create meaningful and sustainable bridges to these supports - in ways tailored to their needs.

She gradually let go of her constant tension, all-consuming worry, and self judgment. Instead, she began to embody a more responsive approach to caregiving. She could now apply all she had learned about his dementia and begin to prioritize and organize her and John’s daily routine and rhythm in a way that gave space to John’s changing cognition. Rebecca could plan without getting swept up in anxiety - trying to guess “what if”. Instead, she trusted her capacity to navigate whatever could come up in the future. She was able to synthesize information from experts, guidance from peers, and her own intuition and apply it to what was actually happening in the moment.

Rebecca knows this will be ongoing work. She has just begun planting the seeds and tending to growth. Building her toolkit of informal and formal practices and using them every day will eventually transform into a way of life, a way of being with whatever arises in daily life. And, as with anything beneficial, wholesome and enriching, she will need to prioritize self-care She will need to protect her mind and heart with reliable and responsive skills that lead to restored stability, renewed clarity and replenished energy for caregiving.