



MIND MATTERS

An interactive series hosted by the
O'Donnell Brain Institute's
Total Care Program in partnership
with DFW Parkinson's Resource

SESSION 1: UNDERSTANDING THE EMOTIONAL LANDSCAPE OF PARKINSON'S

A Toolkit for Reflection, Understanding & Support

This toolkit is designed to help you better understand, reflect on, and navigate the emotional aspects of Parkinson's with clarity and compassion.

INTRODUCTION

The Emotional Side of Parkinson's

Parkinson's affects more than movement. Many individuals and care partners experience emotional changes such as grief, apathy, anxiety, and loss of motivation.

These experiences are:

- Common
- Valid
- Often misunderstood

They are not a personal failure.

This toolkit offers:

- Language to better understand what you're feeling
- Space to reflect and process
- Practical tools to support daily life.

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PARKINSON'S & EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING: PRACTICAL TIPS

For People with Parkinson's and Care Partners

EXPERIENCE

GRIEF

(loss and change;
yearning, missing what
was, emotional waves)

HELPFUL NEXT STEPS (TRY 1-2)

- Name the loss (2–3 specific items).
- Short daily “grief window” (5–10 minutes): journal, pray, reflect.
- Share with one safe person; ask for “listen” or “help.”
- Add one restorative activity daily (sunlight, nature, music, connection).

DEPRESSION

(persistent low mood,
hopelessness, guilt, loss
of pleasure)

- Start with one doable action (2–10 minutes).
- Daily anchors: movement + connection.
- Protect sleep: consistent wake time; morning daylight when possible.
- Tell your care team if symptoms last 2+ weeks or impair daily life.

APATHY

(low drive; hard to start,
less interest, emotionally
flat)

- Make the start tiny: “2 minutes only.”
- Remove decisions: set defaults (same time, same plan).
- Use cues: alarms, checklists, shoes/clothes set out.
- Do it with someone (in person or on the phone).

ANXIETY

(worry, tension, racing
thoughts, feeling on
edge)

- Track 1 week: anxiety (0–10), sleep, caffeine, meds, “off” times.
- 60-second reset: slow exhale breathing + name 5 things you see.
- Schedule worry time (10 minutes/day); write fears + one next step.
- Reduce amplifiers: late caffeine, dehydration, skipped meals, constant news.

DEMORALIZATION

(“I can’t cope,” trapped,
defeated, loss of
meaning)

- Shift global → specific: “The hardest part today is ____.”
- Choose the next 10%: one small step today.
- Prepare a coping list: 3 people + 3 calming actions + 3 reasons to keep going.
- Rebuild meaning with micro-goals aligned with values (family, faith, service).

DAILY 1-MINUTE PLAN

- ☐ Move (5–10 minutes).
- ☐ Connect with someone.
- ☐ Meaningful activity (faith, purpose, creativity, service).
- ☐ One task + one pleasure.
- ☐ Basics: sleep, meds on time, hydration, meals.

BRING TO YOUR NEXT APPOINTMENT:

- Which emotion is most impairing right now?
- Could sleep, pain, meds, or “off” time be worsening this?
- What treatment options fit me (counseling, support groups, med adjustments)?
- Has anything helped?

Did putting language to the experiences on the previous page help you better understand what you, or someone you support, might be experiencing? In what way?

REFLECTION EXERCISE

What Am I Carrying Right Now?

- What feels most different about my life right now?
- What losses feel hardest to name?
- What emotions show up most often?
- What feels hardest to explain to others?

GRIEF AND GROUNDING

What Am I Mourning, and What Still Grounds Me?

What I'm Mourning

(Changes, losses, or fears)

What Still Grounds Me

(People, routines, values, moments)



Reminder: Both can exist at the same time.

SELF-COMPASSION

If This Were Someone You Loved...

- [illegible]

MEANING & PURPOSE

- What gives my life meaning right now?
- What roles or identities still feel important?
- What small actions reflect those values?
- One small action I can take this week:



Meaning doesn't have to be big — it can be built in small, intentional ways.

Understanding Your Strengths

The Values in Action (VIA) survey is a research-based assessment that identifies your unique profile of 24 character strengths, helping you recognize the qualities you naturally bring to your life and relationships. We've included below a link to the survey as a tool to help you better understand yourself.

Why This Matters

When navigating Parkinson's, it's easy to focus on what feels lost or challenging. This tool shifts the focus toward:

- What continues to support you
- What gives you a sense of meaning or identity
- What strengths you can lean on in moments of difficulty

Research shows that understanding and using your strengths can support well-being, resilience, and a greater sense of self.

How to Use This Tool

- Visit: www.viacharacter.org
- Complete the survey (approximately 10–15 minutes)
- Review your top strengths (your "signature strengths")
- Reflect on how these strengths show up in your daily life

For Individuals & Care Partners

This tool is valuable for both:

- People with Parkinson's → to reconnect with identity, purpose, and inner strengths
- Care partners → to better understand both their own strengths and those of the person they support

TAKING ACTION

Small Steps Forward

- One thing that drains my energy:
- One thing that supports my energy:
- One small action I will try this week:
- One person or support I can lean on:



Reminder: Motivation often follows action — start small.

GRATITUDE PRACTICE

Three Small Things

Each day, write down 3 things you're grateful for.

1.

2.

3.

You are not alone.

The emotional side of Parkinson's is real — and support is available.
You don't have to navigate this alone.

Take what feels helpful, and return to these tools
when you need them.



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For continued support and additional resources,
please reach out to us at info@dfwparkinsons.org

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