

### **TOOL 3: PRACTICAL TIPS FOR SUPPORTING CAREGIVERS**

Working with caregivers as well as the people they care for is critical in ensuring the safety and opportunities of both the survivor and the caregiver. It is also essential to recognise that caregivers are most often women and adolescent girls, which means they may experience disadvantages of their own, and that they will likely be over-burdened with domestic responsibilities, including the care of children, the elderly and the maintenance of family life. Care-giving can be a very isolating experience, and the more so for women who are already less likely to have access to opportunities outside the family and the home. The few men who assume care-giving roles for persons with disabilities may also experience stigmatization in the community, as these roles are under-valued in society and further reduces their status among men.

There are times when the actions of caregivers may appear to be unhelpful or disrespectful towards a person with disabilities. It is important to explore and understand how those decisions were made and what alternatives were available. For example, if a woman responsible for the care of an adolescent girl with disabilities is locking her in a room while she goes to the market, it may be that she feels this is her only option to keep the girl safe while she is not at home. It is essential to talk with caregivers about their context and environment, and to understand their reasoning, rather than working from our own assumptions and judgements, before helping them to explore alternatives.

#### **Practical tips to support caregivers**

- Talk with caregivers about the impact of caring on their well-being and their capacity to think about their own needs and the feelings that they have. Make sure you recognize that these are normal feelings to have and that caring is complicated and demanding. Help them to identify their own feeling without guilt, particularly when their feelings are difficult.
- Discuss strategies for paying attention to their own feelings and needs such as:
  - Forming relationships with other women and / or caregivers in similar positions.
  - Finding ways to maintain activities that are important to their own self-care and well-being (e.g. taking time to eat well, bathe, sleep, and to attend community activities they enjoy).
  - Identifying people that they trust to ask for help or additional support.
- Peer support groups can provide an opportunity for caregivers meet others and to share experiences, challenges and successes with each other.
- Breathing and visualization exercises can sometimes be useful when feeling overwhelmed and / or anxious.
- Support caregivers to have access to the different services and programs available, such as skills training or economic empowerment, women's groups and so on, while also ensuring that the survivor with disabilities has alternative support.