



“I don’t know how to change things”

**NAVIGATING GRIEF AND HELPLESSNESS
IN CAREGIVING RELATIONSHIPS**

What is the Purpose of the SCALE Workbook?

The SCALE Workbook was created to review the material provided during the live or recorded webinar series and to help strengthen caregiver learning. The resources and strategies shared here are designed to support you in your caregiving journey.

How Does the Workbook Work?

Every caregiver journey is different! Whether you're a new or experienced caregiver, the more you know about mental health, the better. Whether you watch the live or recorded webinar series, you can access the SCALE Workbook at any time to help nurture your mental health as a caregiver.

Each SCALE Workbook contains the following sections:

- **Personal Caregiving Story** that reflects the emotion outlined in each weekly title.
- **Webinar Summary & Key Takeaways** to help review each weekly topic.
- **Activities** to encourage you to take actionable steps towards managing difficult caregiving emotions.
- **Self-Discovery Questions** to reflect on the difficult caregiving emotion and actionable strategies.
- **Remember...**one final thought from each weekly topic that can continue to motivate you.
- **Suggested Resources** that relate to each weekly topic. Resources can be watched, read and/or listened to. Some resources are free while some may have a small cost (purchasing is not a requirement for the program).

The Journal Icon

In each webinar slide presentation, you will see a **journal icon** (as pictured on the right). The **journal icon** serves as a prompt for caregivers to action on a key activity, question, and resource from this workbook.



TIP

When you see something underlined in blue, press “Ctrl” and click your mouse (or mouse pad) to be taken to the material online. For example, press “Ctrl” and click your mousepad on this: [Ontario Caregiver Organization](#) and you will be taken to our home webpage.



The Caregiver Role

Caregivers are unpaid, ordinary people who provide physical and emotional support to a family member, partner, friend, or neighbour.

Caregiving can include coordinating medical appointments, managing medications, arranging in-home healthcare services, and many other tasks.

A Word of Thanks

A special thanks to all the caregivers involved in creating this meaningful resource and [Creating Connections](#) for partnering with the Ontario Caregiver Organization to create the SCALE webinar series, and for providing practical resources and strategies to support caregivers on their journey.



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PERSONAL CAREGIVING EXPERIENCE

After my 23-year-old son was seriously injured in a motor vehicle accident and lost his mobility forever, I was overwhelmed with sadness. I didn’t know how to feel or how to act around others. As a man, I felt that society discouraged me from expressing my grief and emotions openly. As a result, I developed the unhealthy habit of suppressing my sadness and emotions. In my mind, I grieving became linked to weakness.

After months of feeling this way, I finally decided enough was enough. I signed up for a therapy group at my church, and talking through the accident and the impact of my son’s disability on our family has been incredibly helpful in processing my grief. I also reached out to reconnect with my relatives and friends who had initially rallied around me. They have been wonderful- offering the emotional support I need and helping with my son’s care as well.

In addition, I started writing in a journal every night, noting my feelings, fears, and concerns. This practice has been a powerful way for me to work through my grief, and it’s also helped me be a better caregiver to my son.

Webinar Summary

Caregivers often feel significant grief over the disconnection and loss within their caregiving relationships. Navigating this relationship can often feel frustrating and disappointing. The fourth week of the SCALE webinar series will provide caregivers with the skills they need to re-focus these relationships and find fulfillment within them.

Key Takeaways

1. **Disenfranchised Grief** – Kenneth Doka, a licensed mental health counsellor and preeminent expert in grief, coined the term to refer to a loss that is not openly acknowledged, socially mourned or publicly supported. Since caregivers often lack natural support during their losses, they frequently experience grief without the benefit of a designated mourning period or the sense of closure that typically follows.
2. **Properly mourn what has been lost** from the relationship with your care recipient, allowing yourself moments to acknowledge and grieve this loss. Use the journal prompts below for guidance in working through this grief.
3. Focus on **WHAT IS** in the relationship. Whether it is your care-recipient's strengths or your own.
4. **Nurtured Heart Approach** has 3 stands:
 - Stand 1: Absolutely No - I refuse to energize negativity. I will not reward negativity with my energy, connection, or relationship.
 - Stand 2: Absolutely Yes - I will relentlessly create and energize positivity and success.
 - Stand 3: Absolutely Clear – I set and enforce clear limits and boundaries in an un-energized way.
5. **Positive Recognition:** Utilizing Emotionally Nutritious Language (list attached) to actively find ways to recognize yourself or your care recipient for their positive qualities.

Activity #1:

Noticing Strengths

Caregiving can be challenging, but taking time to recognize strengths—both in yourself and in your care recipient—can foster a more supportive perspective. In this activity, review the list of descriptive words and circle or highlight the strengths you notice in your care recipient. If that feels difficult or emotionally challenging, focus on identifying the strengths you see in yourself. This practice can help shift your awareness toward resilience and meaningful qualities, even in difficult moments.

List of Descriptive Words

A great example	Cooperative	Having a servant's heart
A great listener	Courageous	Having an open mind
A hard worker	Courteous	Having unique ideas
A helper	Creating a peaceful place	Helpful harnessing your energy for good
A joy	Creative	Honest
A problem solver	Dedicated	Honorable
A spirit warrior	Deep thinker	Hopeful
A warrior of good	Delightful in spirit	Humble
Able to think ahead	Detail oriented	Humorous
Acting creatively	Demonstrating integrity	Inquisitive
Acting responsible	Determined	Intuitive
Admirable	Dignified	Inspiring
Appreciative	Discerning	Intelligent
Artistic	Eager to learn	Joyful
Attentive	Easy to like	Kind
Attentive to detail	Efficient	Kind-hearted
Attuned to others	Empathetic	Lighthearted
Authentic	Full of (add own word)	Likable
Aware	Full of generosity	Logical
A good friend	Full of joy	Looking out for others
Being inspirational	Generous	Loving
Being powerful	Gentle	Making an insightful inference
Being wise	Genuine	Making great choices
Brave	Giving	Managing your time well
Brilliantly thinking	Giving of your time	Making an educated guess
Bringing out the best in others	Good-hearted	Merciful
Constructive	Gracious	Mindful
Content	Grateful	
	Handling strong emotions	

Motivated
Neat
Observant
Open-minded
Organized
Peaceful
Persistent
Pleasant
Polite
Positive
Powerful
Powerfully spirited
Productive Purposeful
Passionate
Questioning
Quiet
Reasonable
Receptive to new ideas
Refined

Relationally focused
Relentless
Relentless in finding the
answer
Respectful
Respecting of self
Seeing the big picture
Seeking justice
Self-controlled
Sensing what is right
Sensitive to others' needs
Showing integrity
Showing wisdom
Soulful
Spiritually wise
Steadfast
Strong on the inside
Sunshine to others
Tactful

Teachable
Tenacious
Tender-hearted
Thankful
Thoughtful
Thrifty
Trustworthy
Understanding
Unifying
Uplifting
Using a pleasant voice
Warm
Weighing your choices
Welcoming of all
Well mannered
Wise
Zestful

Activity #2:

Recognition Scripts

The way we acknowledge and reflect on actions—both in others and in ourselves—can shape how we experience caregiving. This exercise is based on the Nurtured Heart Approach®, which encourages recognizing strengths in the present moment rather than letting them go unnoticed.

Practice identifying and verbalizing the positive qualities behind everyday actions. Use the provided sentence structures to describe what you see and the greatness it reflects. Whether recognizing your care recipient, yourself, or others in your life, this practice helps build a stronger sense of appreciation, connection, and self-worth. In the Nurtured Heart Approach®, this type of recognition is called Active and Experiential Recognition.

Active Recognition: We are noticing details. We are valuing each person for who they are. We simply say what we see. As if you are narrating a scene.

Experiential Recognition: Caregivers can improve their experience with their care recipients, others in their lives, or themselves by recognizing and understanding their own experiences more fully. We begin by acknowledging evidence of success (active recognition) and then highlight the exceptional qualities that contribute to it. This firsthand experience of success helps build a collection of positive attributes and strengths.

How to use Active and Experiential Recognition:

Situation: Your son often forgets to lock the door, which creates a safety concern and increases your anxiety.

Rather than: Focusing on what bothers you about his behaviour and what he needs to change (like locking the door), focus on the aspects of his behavior that contribute to the quality you are trying to foster—in this case, responsibility.

You might say: “Mike, I saw you checking the door. This shows me how responsible you are being in taking care of our home.”

Activity for you to practice:

Think about the behaviour or quality trait that you want to foster in your care recipient. Is it their patience, their healthy choices, their responsibility, their determination? Find small ways in which they are expressing that quality in their actions and focus your energy there.

Sample Scripts:

Fill in the Blank: "I see/hear you _____
(action observing), this shows me that you are/your _____
(insert personality quality or greatness)"

Fill in the Blank: "I see/hear you _____
_ (action observing), this shows me that you are/your _____
(insert quality or greatness) because _____"

Fill in the Blank: "I see, notice, etc. that you are (insert personality quality or greatness)"
_____.by

(describe specifically what evidence you have of this by their actions).

Self-Discovery Questions

The following reflection questions are designed as journaling exercises or prompts for personal introspection. Taking time for self-reflection can help reduce stress and support mental wellness, providing you with space to process your emotions and experiences. If journaling isn't your preferred method, you can still use these questions as a guide by setting aside time to reflect on your caregiving journey. Remember, these questions can be revisited as your caregiving role evolves and as your values shift. Self-discovery is an ongoing process, and these reflections can offer valuable insights along the way.

1. How has my relationship with my care recipient changed over time? What aspects of these changes bring me the most grief?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

2. In what ways do I feel the loss of the person my care recipient used to be? What do I miss most?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are approximately 20 lines visible. The paper has a slight shadow on its right side, suggesting it's resting on a surface.

3. What moments of connection do I miss most with my care recipient, and how can I create new ways to connect given our current circumstances?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are approximately 20 lines visible. The paper has a slight shadow on its right side, suggesting it's resting on a surface.

4. How does my grief manifest in my day-to-day caregiving duties? What can I do to acknowledge these feelings without letting them overwhelm me?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are approximately 20 lines visible. The paper has a slight shadow on its right side, suggesting it's resting on a surface.

5. How did I use active or experiential recognition with my care recipient today? (see activity #1).

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

6. Was there a moment today or this week when I felt a connection with my care recipient? What can I notice about how I contributed to that moment?

This image shows a full page of blank, lined paper. It features approximately 28 horizontal blue or grey lines spaced evenly apart, typical of notebook paper. The lines extend across the entire width of the page, leaving small margins at the top and bottom. There are no vertical lines, text, or other markings on the page.

Remember...

Your loss deserves to be acknowledged and grieved with compassion— both for what you hoped for and what you now live without.

Honor the loss you are experiencing, while embracing connection by noticing what IS present in your relationship.

Suggested Resources

Videos:

[The Gifts of Imperfection by Brené Brown](#)

[OCO Webinar - Grief: Facing Illness, Death, and Other Losses](#)

[Igniting Greatness - The Nurtured Heart Approach: Sarah How at TEDxFargo](#)

Articles:

OCO's webpage - [Caregiver Grief and Loss](#)

[How We Grieve the Loss of Those Who Are Still Here](#)

[Navigating Connection After Loss by Creating Connections](#)

[An Unrecognized Grief Carers Guide by Carers Victoria \(Australia\)](#)

Books:

The following books are available in Ontario's public library system, either at your local library or through interlibrary loan.

Brené Brown. *Rising Strong: How the Ability to Reset Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead*. (Random House, 2017). ISBN: 9780812995824

The following resources come with a small cost. Purchasing them is not required for the program. They are offered as additional resources based on caregiver requests. If you're interested, we recommend checking your local library first.

Howard Glasser. *Transforming the Difficult Child: The Nurtured Heart Approach*. (Nurtured Heart Publications, 1999). ISBN: 9780967050706