



“I feel overwhelmed”

MANAGING CAREGIVING STRESS THROUGH
THE POWER OF NOTICING



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

When I first became a caregiver, I thought I was “tough” and could handle the new role without any difficulty. For a while, I tried to prove this to myself. I treated caregiving as a test of my abilities as a mother, wife, and employee.

However, after a few years, I started to notice some changes in my health. I couldn’t sleep at night, had difficulties focusing on my work, and was often sick. I was just feeling really overwhelmed.

After some concerned friends and family forwarded articles to me about caregiver burnout, I realized that what I was experiencing was common for caregivers. It became clear to me that I had to change my approach to caregiving.

I took a step back to reflect on what put me in the position of caregiver. Reflecting on my love for the person I care for gave me the motivation to keep going.

I also made a conscious effort to take care of my own health. For me, this meant going for long walks, cooking special meals and scheduling massage appointments to relax. Friends and family offered to help more often, and I began to accept all offers of help.

All these things helped me to overcome caregiver burnout and appreciate my role as a caregiver.

Webinar Summary

Caregivers are under continuous ongoing stress within their caregiving role, which makes problem solving and managing anxiety very challenging. The third week of the SCALE webinar series will focus on skills to support caregivers in enhancing their quality of life and joy, despite the presence of challenges.

Key Takeaways

1. Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) Approach:

Helps us use present-moment awareness of our body and mind to better understand our thoughts and habits, so we can recognize which ones support our well-being and which ones don't and begin to live more in line with our values.

2. Benefits of the Being in the Present Moment and with Your Thoughts:

- Reduced Stress and Anxiety
- Improve Mental Health
- Enhanced Focus and Attention
- Better Sleep
- Lower Blood Pressure
- Enhanced Relationships
- Greater Life Satisfaction

3. Six Core Principles of ACT:

- *Cognitive Defusion*: Learning to observe thoughts without getting entangled in them.
- *Acceptance*: Embracing thoughts and feelings without trying to change or avoid them.
- *Being Present*: Engaging fully with the here and now, experiencing life as it unfolds.
- *Self-as-Context*: Recognizing a sense of self that is distinct from thoughts and experiences.
- *Values*: Identifying what truly matters to you and guiding your actions accordingly.
- *Committed Action*: Taking meaningful steps towards your values, despite potential obstacles.

4. This workbook is aimed at helping you practice gaining presence in the areas of your thoughts, your emotions, and your physical presence.

Activity #1: Reflecting on Your Values

When you're a caregiver, it's easy for your responsibilities to take center stage, often leaving little space for the activities and moments that bring you joy, energy, and personal fulfillment. This reflection exercise is designed to help you reconnect with what truly matters to you—your core values. These are the things that give you purpose, joy, and a sense of fulfillment. Set aside a few quiet moments to consider the questions below and write down your thoughts. Your answers can serve as a personal guide, helping you make decisions that reflect what's most important to you—even when caregiving responsibilities feel overwhelming.

1. What makes you feel energized?

Reflect on the people, experiences, or activities—past or present—that sparked your energy, excitement, or motivation. What made you feel alive, inspired, or deeply engaged?

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. What makes you feel fulfilled?

Consider the moments when you feel a deep sense of purpose or accomplishment.

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3. What makes you feel happy?

Reflect on what brings you joy, no matter how big or small.

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4. What do you consider most important in life?

Identify the values, relationships, or principles that matter most to you.

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Activity #2: Emotion Reflection

Caregiving can bring up many complex emotions. Taking time to reflect on what you're feeling can help you better understand and manage those emotions. This exercise encourages you to creatively explore a feeling you're experiencing—by giving it form, voice, or visual expression—to process and release it. Approach this exercise with curiosity, allowing yourself to acknowledge and express your feelings without judgment.

1. Describe your current emotion as if it were a place. What does it look, sound and feel like?

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Activity #3:

Five Senses

Mindfulness means being fully present in the moment with openness and without judgment. This exercise encourages you to observe yourself and your surroundings with curiosity—an essential part of the ACT approach. By engaging your senses, you build the habit of being present, which can help you navigate the ups and downs of caregiving with more clarity, calm, and adaptability.

Notice 5 things that you can see.

Notice 4 things that you can feel.

Notice 3 things you can hear.

Notice 2 things that you can smell.

Notice 1 thing that you can taste.

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. Reflect on a moment of caregiving today: What thoughts or emotions did you notice? How did you respond, and what did you learn from this experience?

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4. Notice your self-talk: What are you telling yourself about your caregiving abilities? How can you reframe negative thoughts to be more self-compassionate and supportive?

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5. Describe a moment today when you were fully present: How did being present affect your experience and your interaction with your care recipient?

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Remember...

**The more awareness
of self we gain... the more
control over self we have....**

Suggested Resources

Videos:

[Calm- The Essentials | How to Overcome a Low Mood - The Emotion Isn't You](#)

OCO Webinar - [Cultivating Mindfulness for Well-being Among Caregivers](#)

Articles:

[The Path to Managing Stress - Insights from Acceptance and Commitment Therapy](#)

[ACT Cognitive Defusion Metaphors](#)

Books:

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

Russ, Harris. *The Happiness Trap: How to Stop Struggling and Start Living: A Guide to Act*. (Shambhala, 2008) ISBN: 97816454711652. [The Happiness Trap- Free Resources](#)

Tara Brach. *Radical Acceptance: Embracing Your Life with the Heart of a Buddha*. (Random House Publishing Group, 2004) ISBN: 9780553380996

Nancy L. Kriseman. *The Mindful Caregiver: Finding Ease in the Caregiving Journey*. (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2015) ISBN: 9781442223547

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.

Rob Walker. *The Art of Noticing: Rediscover What Really Matters to You*. ISBN: 9781529104431