



“Who am I aside from a caregiver?”

REDISCOVERING YOURSELF BY
EMBRACING SELF-COMPASSION



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.



“Who am I aside from a caregiver?”

PERSONAL CAREGIVING EXPERIENCE

Shortly after my sister’s 40th birthday, she was hit by a car while crossing the road. The accident left her with a severe traumatic brain injury (TBI), and she was no longer able to care for herself. As her only family member in the area, I became her primary caregiver.

At first, I felt happy and fulfilled in this role. I enjoyed feeling useful, and caring for her gave me a strong sense of purpose. However, as time passed, I began to feel less satisfied. Her condition was complex and constantly changing, which made it hard to manage her needs. The level of care required seemed to exceed the number of hours in the day. I knew something had to change, but I wasn’t sure where to start.

At the time, we were taking each day as it came, with no routine or established schedule to guide us. One day, I decided to try organizing a weekly schedule to see if we could follow it. This marked the beginning of a new routine, which brought great comfort to my sister –who appreciated knowing what to expect – and to me, as it allowed for more structured breaks and rest.

Around the same time, I reviewed our financial situation and realized that we could afford to hire part-time help. This brought tremendous relief and lightened my caregiving load.

I also began advocating for myself. As a caregiver, I was used to speaking up for my sister’s needs, but like many in this role, I had neglected my own well-being. I made it a priority to take all my scheduled personal time. This helped both of us maintain a healthy, supportive adult relationship – something that benefited us both in the long run.

Webinar Summary

Caregivers often struggle to maintain their sense of self and to find self-compassion within their caregiving role. In week 6 of the SCALE webinar series, caregivers will learn practical exercises to incorporate self-compassion into their daily lives. By recognizing personal strengths and areas for growth, participants will learn how compassion can enhance their relationships with themselves and others.

Key Takeaways

1. **Impact of Caregiving on Self-Identity:** Caregiving can dominate your life, often leading you to lose sight of yourself. As the role becomes all-consuming, it begins to shape how you spend your time, what interests you can pursue, and over time, your personal identity.
2. **Emotional Strain:** The emotional challenges of caregiving—such as anger, stress, and guilt—can erode self-esteem and lead to self-doubt. It's crucial to acknowledge, normalize, and validate these feelings to reduce the strain on your emotional well-being.
3. **Social Isolation:** Engaging deeply in caregiving can result in a forced social withdrawal, making you feel disconnected from friends and family, which can in turn affect your self-perception and relationships.
4. **Neglecting Personal Needs:** Caregivers may often neglect their own health and interests, leading to physical and emotional exhaustion. This highlights the importance of prioritizing self-care to maintain overall well-being.
5. **Practicing Self-Compassion:** Embracing self-compassion—by acknowledging your feelings, reconnecting with personal interests, setting boundaries, and celebrating small victories—can help you rediscover your identity and restore balance in your life.

Activity #1: Self-Compassion Test

Instructions: Find a quiet space where you can focus for about 10-15 minutes. Read each statement and rate yourself on a scale from 1 to 5, based on how true each statement is for you. After completing the exercise, add up your scores, divide by 26, and interpret your average score to assess how self-critical you are and where you might benefit from more self-compassion.

Benefits: This exercise helps increase awareness of self-critical thoughts, providing insight into areas where you may need more self-compassion. It supports emotional well-being by reducing stress and improving resilience. Practicing self-compassion strengthens both your relationship with yourself and with those you care for, promoting overall mental and emotional health.

Self-Compassion Test: Please rate each statement on a scale of 1 to 5, where:

1 = Not at all true

2 = Slightly true

3 = Moderately true

4 = Very true

5 = Completely true

Rating	Statement
	I am often hard on myself when I notice my flaws or mistakes in how I care for my care recipient.
	When I'm feeling overwhelmed, I tend to focus on everything that's going wrong in my caregiving responsibilities.
	When things are going badly in my caregiving role, I find it hard to remind myself that every caregiver faces challenges.
	When I think about my caregiving shortcomings, I feel isolated or like I'm not doing enough compared to others.
	I struggle to show myself love and support when I'm feeling emotionally drained from caregiving.
	When I fail to meet expectations in caring for my care recipient, I tend to criticize myself harshly.
	When I feel down about caregiving, I often think that no one else feels as overwhelmed as I do.
	During difficult caregiving moments, I tend to be tough on myself instead of being kind and patient with myself.

Rating	Statement
	When something upsetting happens in my caregiving, I sometimes let my emotions take over and don't manage them well.
	When I feel inadequate in my caregiving role, I believe other caregivers have everything under control while I don't.
	I get frustrated and impatient with myself when I think about aspects of my caregiving that I don't feel good about.
	When I'm struggling with caregiving, I tend to neglect my own needs for rest, care, and compassion.
	When I'm feeling down or stressed, I often think that other caregivers are doing better than I am.
	When something challenging happens in caregiving, I tend to blow it out of proportion and struggle to keep things in perspective.
	I often think of my caregiving mistakes as something I should be ashamed of, rather than recognizing that all caregivers make mistakes.
	When I notice flaws in how I care for my care recipient, I tend to dwell on them and become overly self-critical.
	When I feel like I've failed in my caregiving duties, I struggle to keep things in perspective and often feel like I've let my care recipient down.
	When I'm struggling with caregiving, I tend to feel that other caregivers have it easier than I do.
	I am not always kind to myself when I'm experiencing the emotional toll of caregiving.
	When something upsets me in my caregiving role, I tend to get overwhelmed by my emotions and have trouble processing them.
	I am often hard on myself when I'm struggling emotionally with the demands of caregiving.
	When I feel down about caregiving, I tend to shut myself off from my feelings or ignore them, instead of being open to them.
	I often find it difficult to accept and be tolerant of my own flaws or imperfections as a caregiver.
	When something painful or difficult happens in caregiving, I tend to overreact or make things feel worse than they are.
	When I feel like I've failed at caregiving, I often feel like I'm the only one going through this struggle.
	I am often critical and impatient with myself about parts of my caregiving role that I feel I'm not doing well.
	Total

Rating Scale

26-60: Low Self-Criticism. We can all use more self-compassion though.

You may not be very self-critical, but there may still be room for growth in terms of being kinder and more supportive to yourself. It could be helpful to work on nurturing your self-compassion.

61-85: Moderate Self-Criticism. Try some self-compassion exercises.

You show some self-compassion, but you can be critical of yourself in certain situations. Focus on developing a more balanced, understanding approach towards yourself.

86-110: High Self-Criticism. Significant self-compassion needed.

You may struggle with being self-critical and could benefit greatly from learning how to treat yourself with more kindness and understanding. It's a good time to start working on cultivating self-compassion.

111-130: Very High Self-Criticism. Immediate focus on self-compassion needed.

You are likely to be very hard on yourself and may benefit from focused work on self-compassion. Consider reaching out for support or therapy to develop a kinder and more compassionate relationship with yourself.

Activity #2: Letter of Self-Compassion

If you find that you are too hard on yourself or hear critical thoughts often in your mind, try the exercise below.

Writing a letter of self-compassion can prompt us to be more forgiving and refocus our thinking on being more accepting, caring, and supportive to ourselves and others. Complete the questions below to practice an act of self-compassion.

Describe an event that happened today when you felt your emotions were out of control or unwelcome:

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 no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Now, write a brief letter to yourself.

Write the letter with a message of forgiveness and acceptance for who you are and the emotions you experience. Write as though you were talking to a close friend, and show your compassion (for example, I am sad that you felt so angry today, that must have been distressing).

Write down whatever thoughts come to your mind. No one needs to read it. You are safe to be open regarding your feelings. Read back what you have written. Recognize that all of us have emotions we wish we could avoid, but that we can see them as separate from who we are and share them with others – showing our vulnerable side.

Write your self-compassion letter here:

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 no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

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 Past Interests:

- Write about hobbies or activities you enjoyed in the past. What made them special? Why did you stop?
- Example prompt: “I used to love [activity]. It made me feel [emotion] because [reason].”

Look at the list below for some inspiration:

- Reading
- Journaling
- Hiking or Walking
- Meditation or Yoga
- Cooking or Baking
- Drawing or Painting
- Playing Sports
- Listening to Music
- Gardening
- Traveling
- Photography
- Crafting
- Volunteering
- Playing Musical Instruments
- Watching TV or movies
- Exercising or Working Out
- Learning a New Skill
- Attending Events or Classes
- Socializing
- Exploring Local Attractions

[illegible]

2. Explore New Possibilities:

- Think about new hobbies you might want to try. What excites you about them?
- Example prompt: “I’ve always wanted to try [new hobby] because [reason].”

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3. Set Realistic Goals:

- Identify small, achievable steps to re-engage with an old hobby or start a new one.
- Example prompt: “To start [hobby], I will [first step] this week.”

[illegible]

4. Visualize Your Ideal Day:

- Imagine a perfect day filled with activities you love. What does it look like?
- Example prompt: “My ideal day includes [activities]. These make me feel [emotion].”

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 the right side, suggesting it's resting on a surface.

5. Track Your Progress:

- Keep a log of your experiences as you try out different hobbies. Note what you enjoyed and what you didn't.
- Example prompt: "Today, I tried [hobby]. I felt [emotion] because [reason]."

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6. Reflect on Your Feelings:

- Write about how engaging in these activities makes you feel. Are there any patterns or insights?
- Example prompt: “When I do [hobby], I feel [emotion]. This tells me [insight].”

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Remember...

You owe yourself the love that you so freely give to other people.

Self-care is giving the world the best of you, instead of what's left of you.

Suggested Resources

Videos:

[The Power of Vulnerability” by Brené Brown \(TED Talk\)](#)

[OCO’s Webinar - Taking Care of Yourself While You Care for Others](#)

Articles:

[100 Ways to Self-Soothe by Alexandra Art Therapy](#)

Online Activity:

[Self-Compassion Test by Kirstin Neff](#)

[Self-Compassion Practices by Kirstin Need](#)

[Online Workbook and Information Sheets on Self-Compassion by Centre for Clinical Interventions](#)

Books:

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

Kristin Neff, Ph.D. Self-Compassion: *The Proven Power of Being Kind to Yourself*. (William Morrow Paperbacks, 2015).

Neff, K. (2021). ISBN: 9780062079176 (Also available as an eBook or Audiobook)