



“I feel alone”

CREATING MEANINGFUL CONNECTIONS



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.



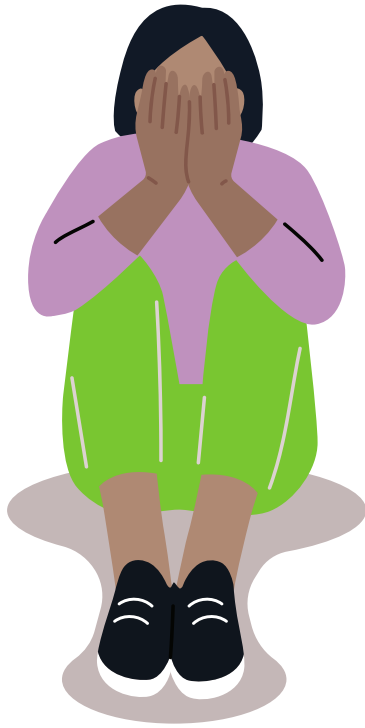
The Caregiver Role

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.

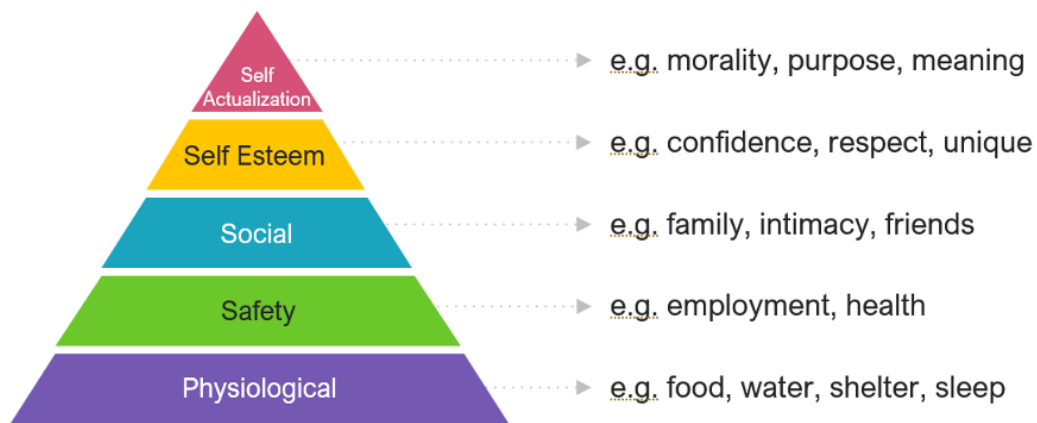
In addition, I started writing in a journal every night, noting my feelings, fears, and concerns. This practice has been a powerful way for me to work through my grief, and it's also helped me be a better caregiver to my son.

Webinar Summary

Caregivers 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. **Hierarchy of Needs:** The need for human connection is one of our most basic needs. Meeting that need is nothing to feel guilty about.



2. **Loneliness:** The subjective feeling of being disconnected or isolated, despite having social interactions. It is distinct from solitude, which is the state of being alone but not necessarily feeling isolated.

3. **Circles of Connection:** Connections and relationships can be fostered and nurtured in many forms:

- **Professional Support:** Colleagues, mentors, or support groups specifically for caregivers.
- **Familial Support:** Family members who can offer practical or emotional support.
- **Cultural and Spiritual Support:** Community groups or spiritual practices that provide a sense of belonging and purpose.
- **Activity-Based Support:** Engagement in hobbies or activities that bring joy and connection with others.

4. **Identify the Circles that Need Strengthening:** Gain a clearer understanding of your current supports, as well as those that need strengthening by completing the Circle of Connections map below.

5. How to Make Time for Connections

A. **Schedule Regular Check-In:** Set aside specific times each week for brief calls or messages with close friends and family. Even a quick text or 10-minute call can help maintain connections without requiring significant time investment.

B. **Focus on Quality Over Quantity:** Invest time in deepening a few important relationships rather than spreading yourself thin. Quality interactions can be more fulfilling and effective than numerous superficial ones.

C. **Be Clear About Your Availability:** Communicate your time constraints to friends and family to manage expectations. They may appreciate understanding your busy schedule and be more supportive.

D. **Prioritize and Delegate:** Identify your most important relationships and prioritize them. Delegate tasks or adjust other commitments to create space for meaningful social interactions.

6. SMART Goals are another way to improve these connections (see Activity #2 on Page 12).

Activity #1:

Circles of Connection

This exercise will help you reflect on your support network and personal needs by mapping out different levels of connections in concentric circles. It is designed to help you identify where support exists in your life and how different people or groups contribute to your overall well-being.

Instructions: (practice with the coloured circle on the following page)

1. Start with the Center Circle: **GREEN**

- a. Reflect on your personal needs and well-being. What activities or practices help you feel grounded and connected to yourself?
- b. These could be practices like meditation, exercise, journaling, or moments of solitude. Write down what helps you feel centered and nurtured in the innermost circle.

2. Add Immediate Family: **BLUE**

- a. Move to the second circle. In this circle, list the family members who are directly involved in your daily life or who provide significant emotional or practical support.
- b. This might include your spouse, children, or parents who help with caregiving or offer significant emotional comfort.

3. Extend to Close Friends and Extended Family: **PURPLE**

- a. In the third circle, write down the names of close friends and extended family members who may not be directly involved in caregiving but are important sources of support.
- b. These could be friends who check in regularly or family members who provide support during visits or occasional caregiving tasks.

4. Cultural and Spiritual Community: **PINK**

- a. In the fourth circle, list any groups or communities related to cultural, spiritual, or religious practices that offer a sense of connection and support.
- b. This could include religious communities, spiritual groups, or cultural organizations that help you feel connected to a larger community.

5. Activity-Based Groups: **YELLOW**

- a. In the outermost circle, write down any activity-based groups or acquaintances that provide a sense of community but aren't as personally involved.
- b. These could be hobby groups, exercise classes, social clubs, or volunteer organizations.

6. Professional Connections: **YELLOW**

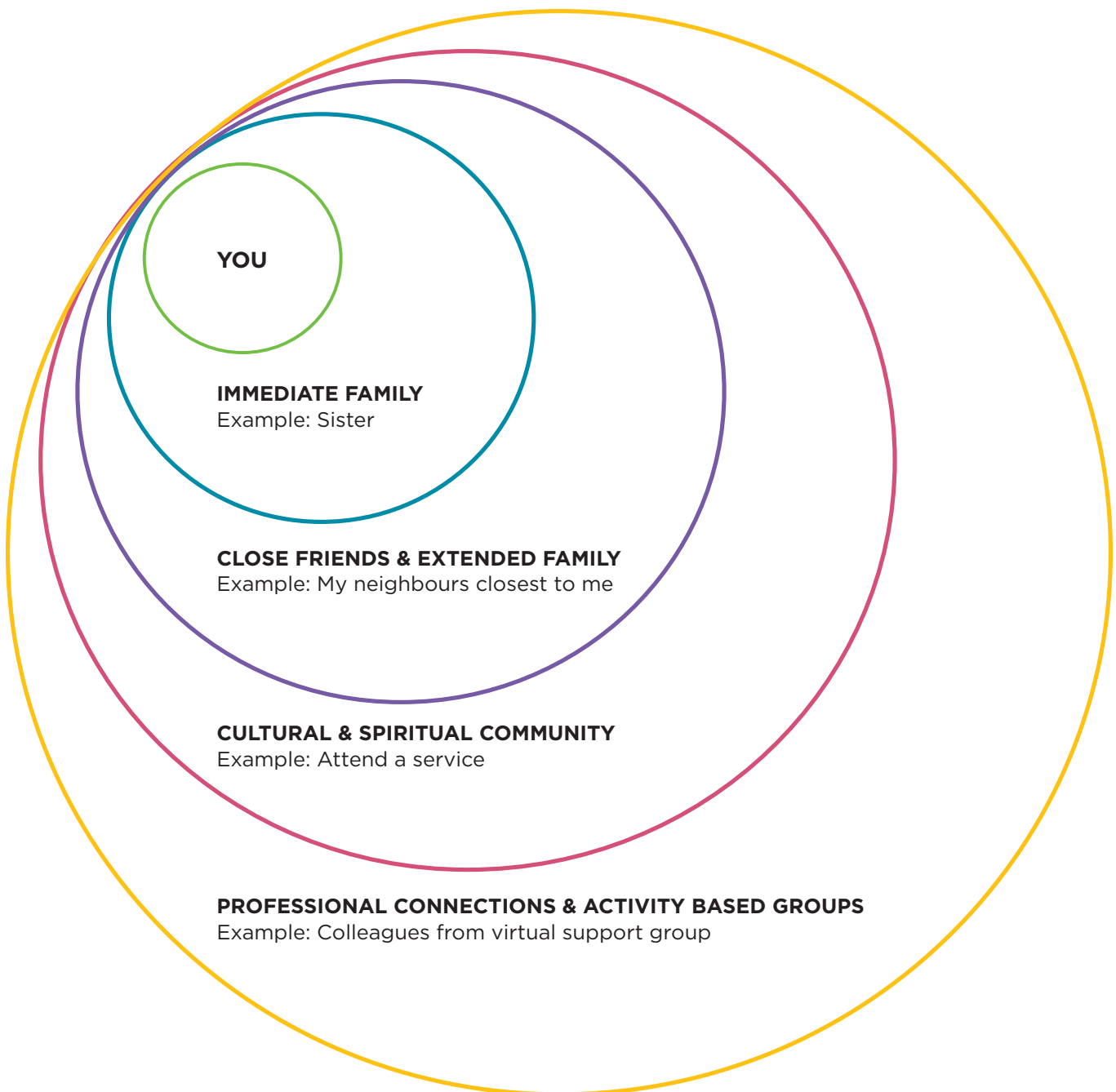
- a. Alongside activity-based groups, also identify any colleagues, mentors, or professional networks that provide support, guidance, or a sense of belonging.
- b. These connections might not be personal but can be valuable for career advice, emotional support, or professional development.

Activity #1:

Circles of Connection

Notice the examples in each circle:

- Use the empty circle provided on the next page
- Continue to add what is needed
- Review the connections

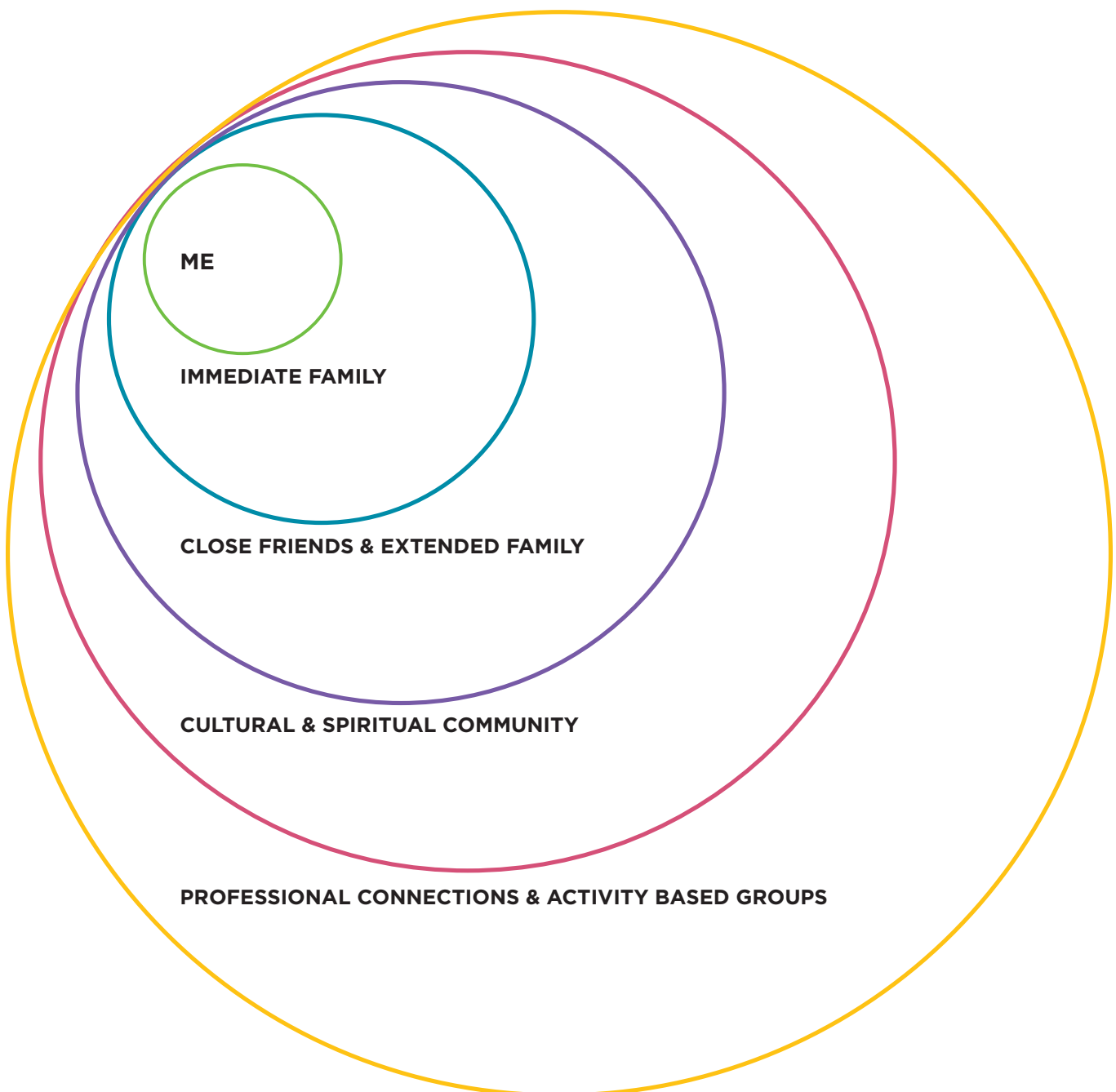


Activity #1:

Circles of Connection (continued)

Build your own circle of connection below. Remember:

- Continue to add what is needed
- Review the connections
- Reflect on these connections on the next page



Activity #2:

Circles of Connection (continued)

Which circle feels most connected and supported to you?

Are there any circles where you feel a lack of support or could benefit from strengthening connections?

How might you prioritize or nurture these relationships in the coming weeks to ensure your well-being?

Activity #2:

SMART Goal Setting

SMART goals set you up for success by making goals specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and timely. The SMART method helps push you further, gives you a sense of direction, and helps you organize and reach your goals.

S	Specific	Think of what you want to achieve and be as clear as possible. For example: I want to create a list of people who can help me with my caregiving role when I start university in September.
M	Measurable	Think of how you can measure this goal. For example: I need 8 people on my list with the activities which they can do as my circle of support.
A	Achievable	Think of how you can ensure this goal succeeds. For example: I will let those close to me know that this is my goal and ask them to check in on me. I will set myself reminders in my phone to work on this goal.
R	Realistic	Think of how realistic this goal is. For example: I am working full time but can organize this list on the weekends. My friend is good at staying organized, so I can ask her for suggestions on setting up a schedule for my circle of support.
T	Timely	Think of the time frame that you need this goal completed. For example: If I create this list over the summer, it will help me better manage my time in September when university begins. I am giving myself three months to complete this goal.

Activity #2:

SMART Goal Setting (continued)

Things to consider: Are my goals too big, too small, too vague, not identifiable? Some common types of goals to consider:

- Save money on something
- Increase help or support for someone or something
- Make something
- Reduce something (it could be tangible like products you purchase, or intangible, like excessive worry)
- Develop a new routine

As you move through each step, you will navigate closer to your goal or objective you want to accomplish. It will help to show you the path that you need to take to reach your goal.

Build your own SMART goal(s):

S	Specific	
M	Measurable	
A	Achievable	
R	Realistic	
T	Timely	

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. What is one way you've experienced loneliness in your caregiving role?

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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.

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.

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.

Remember...

You are not alone on this journey. You are part of a community of caregivers who understand your struggles, share your emotions, and are here to support you every step of the way.

Suggested Resources

Videos:

[The Secret to Living Longer may be Your Social Life by Susan Pinker](#)

[Importance Of Social Connections - Social Life - Social Interactions by What's Up Dude](#)

Articles:

[The Importance of Connecting Carers through Social Connections by Canadian Home Care Association and Cares Canada](#)

[Social Connectedness 101: The Many Pathways to Social by Social Creatures](#)

[The Importance of Community by Psychology Today](#)

Books:

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

Jennie Allen. *Find Your People: Building Deep Community in a Lonely World*. (WaterBrook, 2022). ISBN: 9780593558232