

THE CAREGIVER'S TOOLKIT



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SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction to *The Caregiver's Toolkit*

The Goal of The Caregiver's Toolkit

The Caregiver's Toolkit is designed to provide caregivers with practical advice, resources, and emotional support strategies. It synthesizes key insights and shared experiences from a five-part workshop series, focusing on topics such as self-care, boundary setting, and support systems.

Who is The Caregiver's Toolkit For?

The Caregiver's Toolkit is for anyone who identifies as a caregiver, be it the caregiver of a parent, child, adult child, spouse, sibling, friend, or other family member. Caregiving can begin at various stages of life. Regardless of who is providing and receiving the support, caregivers share a common need for self-care practices and diverse coping strategies.

How to Use The Caregiver's Toolkit

The Caregiver's Toolkit is designed to have three main components.

- *Making Space For You* – This section focuses on self-assessment tools to help the caregiver determine their baseline, understand their needs, and regularly check in with themselves.
- *Making Space for Change* – This section highlights various tools and strategies to help the caregiver care for themselves and feel supported by others.
- *My Caregiving Plan* – This section offers a space for the caregiver to make a personalized plan for themselves moving forward.

Each section consists of interactive elements for caregivers to assess, take notes, and plan. The sections can be worked through in order, or according to the needs of the caregiver. An in-depth *Resource Guide* is included at the end of this toolkit, which includes articles, weblinks, videos, books, and more, to further support those on their caregiving journey.

Caregiving Definitions

Caregiver – A caregiver is a person who tends to the needs or concerns of a person with short or long-term limitations due to illness, injury or disability. A caregiver may support a loved one such as a parent, child, adult child, spouse, sibling, friend, or other family member.

Stress – Physical, emotional or mental strain due to high demands, overwhelming situations, or pressure.

Chronic Stress – A prolonged period of consistent stress with minimal to no respite.

Caregiver Burnout – A state of physical, emotional, or mental exhaustion that can be the result of chronic stress. Burnout can look different from person to person. Common warning signs may include fatigue, changes in mood, loss of interest in everyday activities, and/or disruption to sleep or appetite.

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

Advantages & Disadvantages of Caregiving

Possible Advantages

- + Sense of purpose
- + Deeper connection with loved one receiving care
- + Gratitude and appreciation from loved one receiving care
- + Peace of mind that loved one is receiving proper care

Possible Disadvantages

- Emotional, physical, or mental strain
- Impact on personal identity
- Less flexibility with schedule and finding time for self
- Feelings of loneliness or isolation
- Financial challenges or changes

There are only four kinds of people in this world: those who have been caregivers, those who are currently caregivers, those who will be caregivers and those who will need caregivers. Caregiving is universal.

– Rosalynn Carter

The Caregiver's **Bill of Rights**



As a caregiver, I have the right...

1. To take care of myself, to rest when I'm tired, to eat well, and to take breaks from caregiving when I need them.
2. To recognize the limits of my own endurance and strength.
3. To seek help from family, involved parties, and the community at large.
4. To socialize, maintain my interests, and to do the things that I enjoy.
5. To acknowledge my feelings, whether positive or negative, including frustration, anger, and depression; and to express them constructively.
6. To take pride in the valuable work that I do, and to applaud the courage and inventiveness it takes to meet the needs of my care recipient.
7. To prioritize my own health and well-being by practicing self-care, including regular physical activity, mindfulness, and seeking medical or professional support when needed.

SECTION 2: MAKING SPACE FOR YOU



Sharing our truths can provide the opportunity for great healing.

— Kristen Noel

Understanding Self-Assessment Tools

What Is a Self-Assessment?

Self-assessments involve reflecting on your current state and experience. Assessment tools, and prompts can help with determining your baseline, areas for improvement, and ongoing progress. Regularly checking in with yourself can help to bring clarity as to which strategies improve your overall experience, and which are not serving you.

What Are the Benefits?

- Fosters space for solitude and personal reflection
- Builds self-awareness and mindfulness
- Creates a reference point for future check-ins
- Encourages intentional action



Caregiving & You

Who am I outside of caregiving?

Consider hobbies, interests, likes/dislikes, goals, purpose, and feelings.

Who am I as a caregiver?

Consider your mood, feelings, energy, goals, and outlook.

What effects does caregiving have on me?

Consider both positive and negative effects on the different domains of your life.

What does my ideal day look like?

Imagine a day entirely to yourself, without the responsibilities of caregiving. What would YOU want to do? Where would you spend your time? Who would you spend it with?

SECTION 2: MAKING SPACE FOR YOU



Identifying Your Coping Strategies

Coping strategies are ways of dealing with stressful situations or difficult emotions. They can help you feel more in control, reduce stress, and improve your well-being. Coping strategies can be conscious or unconscious actions. Some coping strategies are healthier than others, and it can be helpful to reflect on which strategies you are currently using and how well they are working for you.

Considering Coping Strategies on a Spectrum

Watching a favourite show	←→	Chronic screen use
Leisure shopping with a friend	←→	Online shopping in excess
Enjoying occasional comfort foods	←→	Over consumption of unhealthy foods
Taking time for yourself	←→	Isolating from family and community



Pause & Reflect

1. What are my current coping strategies for managing caregiver stress?
2. What is working for me?
3. What is not working for me?

Common Caregiver Emotions

It is common for caregivers to experience a wide range of emotions. Taking the time to reflect on your emotions on a regular basis can help to bring awareness to your experience and soften the discomfort that may come with those emotions. Remember, not all emotions that caregivers experience are “negative”.



Circle or highlight the emotions that resonate with you as a caregiver. Feel free to use the space at the bottom to fill in other emotions not included in this chart.

Guilty	Loving	Lonely	Proud
Sad	Tired	Valued	Grateful
Trusting	Courageous	Grief	Hopeful
Confident	Worried	Happy	Frustrated
Sensitive	Disappointed	Eager	Scared
Resentful	Overwhelmed	Content	Irritated
_____	_____	_____	_____

SECTION 2: MAKING SPACE FOR YOU



Self-Evaluation Tool for Caregivers

How to Use: Circle the number that most closely reflects your experience as a caregiver; total your score at the bottom and consider areas for improvement. Return to this tool as you see fit to check back in with yourself and compare your score to previous evaluations.

	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
I am experiencing low energy or fatigue.	1	2	3	4
I am experiencing physical strain.	1	2	3	4
I do not feel I have time to take care of my physical health (e.g., diet, exercise, sleep.).	1	2	3	4
I am experiencing impacts to my mental health.	1	2	3	4
I am feeling highly emotional or irritable.	1	2	3	4
I am experiencing resentment towards my loved one.	1	2	3	4
I am experiencing a reduction in social interactions outside my role as a caregiver.	1	2	3	4
I have turned down opportunities of interest in order to be present for my loved one.	1	2	3	4
I do not feel like I can leave my home whenever I want to.	1	2	3	4
I do not feel I have any time to myself.	1	2	3	4
I do not feel I have enough time to complete all my daily responsibilities.	1	2	3	4
I find it difficult to say no to non-mandatory requests or obligations.	1	2	3	4
I am currently not accessing support within my community.	1	2	3	4
I do not feel I have a strong personal support system (e.g., friends, family, community.).	1	2	3	4

TOTAL: _____ **DATE:** _____

Comments: _____

SECTION 3: MAKING SPACE FOR CHANGE



Self-care means giving the world the best of you instead of what's left of you. — Katie Reed



Navigating Self-Care

What Is Self-Care?

Self-care is really what it sounds like – caring for yourself. It involves tending to your physical, emotional, mental, social, and spiritual needs. While self-care can certainly involve pleasurable activities that make you feel good, it can also mean facing “the hard stuff”. Sometimes taking real care of yourself means being a little uncomfortable, but understanding that it will lead to lasting benefits in the end.

Why Is Self-Care So Important?

Ignoring self-care is to ignore the needs of your mind, body, and soul. In the long-term, this can result in implications for your health and overall well-being, including chronic stress and burnout.



Self-care is not just about going to the spa or taking a bubble bath. It is every moment that you take for yourself. Reading this toolkit, right now, is an act of self-care.



Pause & Reflect

1. What is one small act of self-care that works for you, and how do you make time for it?
2. What strategies help you balance caregiving with your own well-being?
3. How do you recognize when you need to take a break or focus on self-care?

SECTION 3: MAKING SPACE FOR CHANGE

TIPS & STRATEGIES FOR PRACTICING SELF-CARE



Review the Self-Care Menu below and consider which tools and strategies resonate most with you. Remember that these are just ideas; not everything is for everyone, and there are many more options out there. Circle or highlight what stands out to you, and use the extra space to add your own ideas.

Self-Care Menu

Physical Self-Care

- Move your body (e.g., cardio, strength training, yoga, sports)
- Eat nutritious meals
- Stay hydrated
- Get a good night sleep
- Tend to your health needs
- Get a massage
- Personal Hygiene

Emotional Self-Care

- Journaling
- Mindfulness / Meditation
- Deep Breathing
- Practice Gratitude
- Therapy
- Positive Self Talk
- Identifying, processing, and accepting challenging emotions

Mental Self-Care

- Learn or try new things
- Reading for pleasure
- Audiobooks and Podcasts
- Bibliotherapy (self-help books)
- Keep an agenda or calendar
- Make lists
- Attend a support group (virtually or in-person)

Social Self-Care

- Connect with friends or family
- Laughter
- Attend community events
- Join a group or club (virtually or in-person)
- Organize a lunch
- Go to the library or recreation centre
- Spend time at markets, fairs, or other larger community events

Spiritual Self-Care

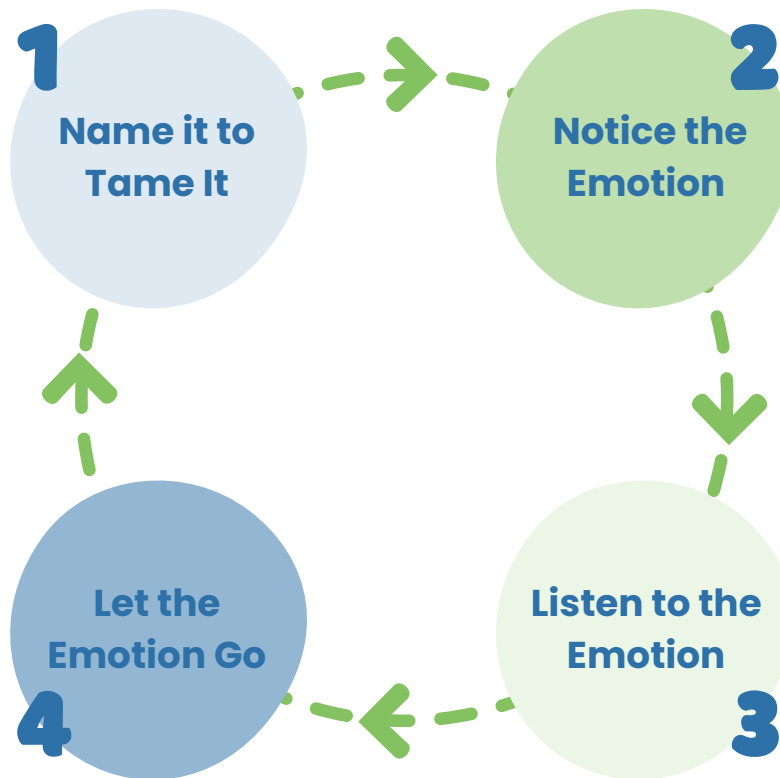
- Prayer
- Visualization
- Attend religious / spiritual ceremonies
- Attend church-based groups
- Creative Arts (visual, dance, music)
- Listen to music

Add Your Own:

SECTION 3: MAKING SPACE FOR CHANGE

Navigating Challenging Emotions

4 Steps for Processing Challenging Emotions



1. **Name It to Tame It** – Identify and label the emotion. Say it out loud, “I feel angry” or “I feel hurt”.
2. **Notice The Emotion** – Where and how do you experience this feeling in your body?
3. **Listen to the Emotion** – What message is it trying to send you? Give yourself space to express the emotion fully.
4. **Let the Emotion Go** – Give yourself permission to release the emotion, and not let it consume you. Inhale deeply, and exhale fully until the emotion softens.



Processing difficult emotions can be uncomfortable in the moment. This is completely normal, and a part of the journey. Giving space for short-term discomfort, often leads to long-term ease and clarity.

SECTION 3: MAKING SPACE FOR CHANGE



Boundaries are like fences; they keep out what you don't want and protect what you value. – Henry Cloud

Navigating Boundaries

What Are Boundaries?

Boundaries are the limits and rules that define what is acceptable for you. Boundaries typically mean “drawing a line” so the people around us know how we want and need to be treated, and understand how much we can offer in any given situation.

Why Are Boundaries So Important?

Boundaries can help to protect your time, energy, and feelings, and honour your needs, goals and values. Having healthy boundaries in place can help with avoiding stress and burnout.

TIPS & STRATEGIES FOR SETTING HEALTHY BOUNDARIES

Steps for Setting Boundaries:

1. **Identify** – What are your own needs and limits. How much are you able to give in this situation?
2. **Accept** – Clearly understand why this boundary is essential for you and decide that it is important for you to protect it.
3. **Communicate** – Present your boundaries in a calm and polite tone while being straightforward and clear.
4. **Remember** – You do not need to apologize or explain your boundary to anyone. Everyone has the right to set boundaries and it is normal and okay if setting boundaries feels a little uncomfortable at first, it will get easier.

What Can Boundaries Look Like?

- Saying no to a social event when you do not have the energy or desire to attend.
- Saying no to more responsibilities than what is necessary.
- Saying no to responsibilities that you once had, but can no longer manage.
- Saying no to answering the phone, text messages, or emails.



Remember “No.” is a complete sentence. By saying no, you leave room to create a caregiving schedule that allows time and space for yourself.



Pause & Reflect

1. What do you wish others understood about your need for boundaries?
2. How do you manage feelings of guilt when taking time for yourself?

SECTION 3: MAKING SPACE FOR CHANGE



Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much. – Helen Keller

Navigating Support Systems

What Are Support Systems?

A support system is a network of people or resources that provide practical or emotional assistance. Support systems can be found in many different areas of life, including family, work, social settings, and the community.

Why Are Support Systems So Important?

Support systems are key to managing stress as a caregiver. Having others to lean on can help to reduce the load you carry and reduce feelings of isolation, chronic stress, and burnout.

TIPS & STRATEGIES FOR BUILDING SUPPORT SYSTEMS

- **Join a Support Group** – Caregiver support groups are often available virtually or in-person in your local community. Connecting with like-minded individuals who can relate to your experience as a caregiver can be more relieving than you might think!
- **Go-To Buddy** – Consider who you can call on in your life if you need someone to talk to. It can be helpful to have an impartial judge or “sounding board” to help you organize your thoughts and feelings.
- **To-Do List** – Consider what is on your to-do list that can be offloaded onto someone else. Is there a spouse, friend, or family member who can assist? Be specific and direct with your communication and remember that it is okay to ask for help!
- **Have Some Fun** – Who is the person or people you enjoy spending time with. Maybe it’s shopping, watching a sports game, going out for a meal, or engaging in a physical activity.
- **Community Resources** – What services are available in your community to help you feel more supported? Consider disability service navigators, therapeutic providers, respite workers, or recreational organizations.



Pause & Reflect

1. What does an ideal support system look like for you?
2. How do you cope with feelings of loneliness or isolation?
3. How do you ask for help when you need it?



Asking for help should never be mistaken as a sign of weakness. In fact, it can be one of the most courageous things a person can do.

SECTION 4: MY CAREGIVING PLAN

Creating a Caregiving Plan

The goal of this section is to provide a space to put the tools and strategies learned throughout this toolkit into action. The upcoming pages include templates that you can fill in to help begin and inspire your personalized caregiving plan. Other recommendations for developing a caregiving plan include:

- Keeping a caregiving journal
- Regularly checking back in with yourself, and using this toolkit or other resources to help support your planning and reflection.



Taking care of yourself doesn't mean me first; it means me too. – L.R. Knost

My Self-Care Map

What Is Self-Care Mapping?

Self-care mapping is an intentionally designed plan that highlights the various domains of one's life (e.g., physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, social), and leaves space to determine which self-care tools or strategies you wish to implement for each.



Complete your self-care map by identifying the different domains of well-being: physical, emotional, mental, social, and spiritual. In each domain, list activities that help you feel balanced and generate positivity.

Example	Blank Template
<div><div>Physical</div><div><div>Exercise</div><div>Bubble Bath</div><div>Drink Water</div></div></div> <div><div>Emotional</div><div><div>Journal</div><div>Deep Breaths</div><div>Therapy</div></div></div>	<div><div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div></div> <div><div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div></div>



Reference the self-care menu for ideas!

SECTION 4: MY CAREGIVING PLAN



My Circle of Support

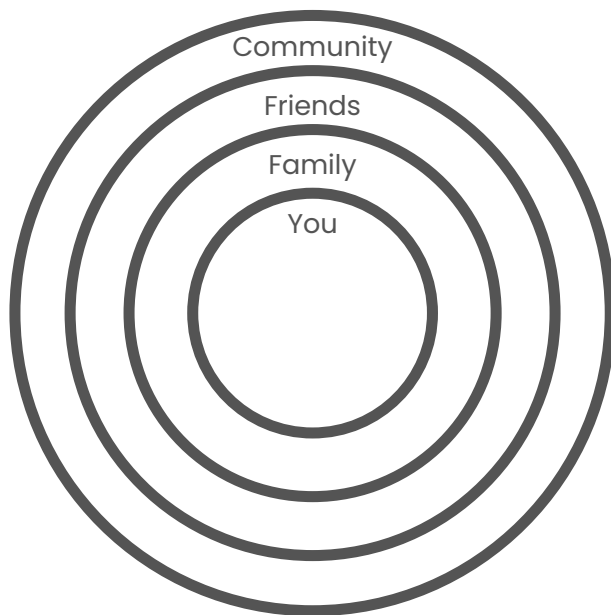
What Is a Circle of Support Diagram?

This tool is intended to help you identify who in your life is available to offer support or connection, and in what manner. This can include friends, family, neighbours, or community.

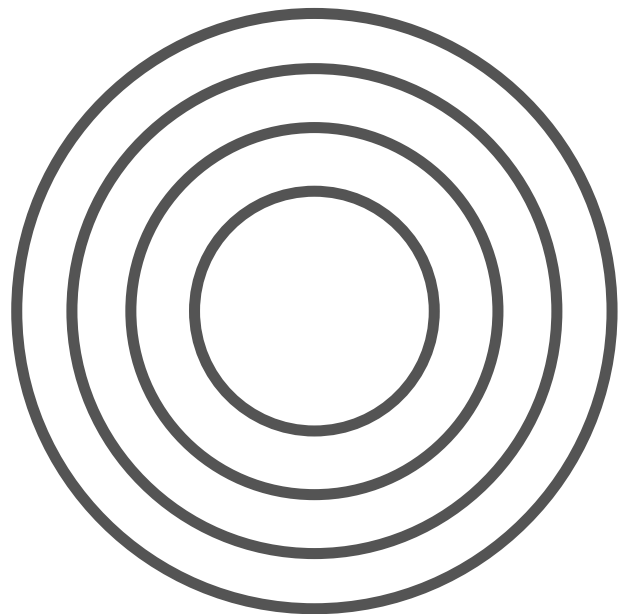


To complete your Circle of Support diagram, start by placing you, the individual, at the centre of the circle. In each outer ring, list the people or groups who provide support in that area, such as family members, close friends, and community organizations.

Example



Blank Template



While we recognize the value of surrounding ourselves with support, it is important to remember that more is not always better in terms of friendships. It is often more meaningful to have four quarters, rather than 100 pennies.

SECTION 4: MY CAREGIVING PLAN



My Caregiver Credo

What Is a Credo?

A credo is a statement of beliefs that are meant to guide actions and help to maintain a certain mindset or outlook on life. A credo can be used as a positive mantra or affirmation to return to when times feel particularly stressful or challenging.



Complete your caregiver credo by reflecting on the prompts below. Use the space provided to write your responses. Keep it simple and honest, focusing on your experiences and commitments.

Example	Blank Template
I recognize that I have many responsibilities including...	_____ _____ _____
I recognize the effects that caregiving can have on my life such as	_____ _____ _____
I am proud of myself for....	_____ _____ _____
I am grateful for...	_____ _____ _____
I promise to try my best to...	_____ _____ _____
I accept that....	_____ _____ _____



How can you ensure you see your credo regularly? Maybe this means sticking it to your bathroom mirror or refrigerator, leaving it on your bedside table, or writing it in the cover of your journal. Be creative!

SECTION 5: RESOURCE GUIDE

CANADA WIDE RESOURCES

Canadian Centre For Caregiving Excellence

<https://canadiancaregiving.org/>

Support For Caregivers (including podcasts)

EI Caregiving Benefits

<https://www.canada.ca/en/services/benefits/ei/caregiving.html>

Partners For Planning

<https://www.planningnetwork.ca/home>

Mental Health Commission of Canada

<https://mentalhealthcommission.ca/caregiver-resources/>

Excellent Caregiver Organization and Website that contains links to various caregiving sites in all provinces across Canada

ONTARIO CAREGIVER WEBSITES

The Ontario Caregiver Organization

<https://ontariocaregiver.ca/>

This website has great tools and podcasts for caregivers to listen to and learn.

Ontario Health at Home

<https://ontariohealthathome.ca/above-and-beyond-caregiver-recognition-program/resources-for-caregivers/>

Excellent Ministry Website that provides multiple links to caregiving sites in Ontario. This website also includes information about the Caregiver Tax benefit and other useful tax information.

QUEBEC CAREGIVER WEBSITE

Quebec Resources for Caregivers

<https://www.ciusswestcentral.ca/programs-and-services/caregivers/resources-for-caregivers/>

Excellent website containing many emergency numbers and services available to caregivers throughout Quebec.

SECTION 5: RESOURCE GUIDE

MANITOBA CAREGIVER WEBSITE

Long Term & Continuing Care Association of Manitoba

<https://www.ltcam.mb.ca/caregiver-resources>

This one site has everything you need.

ALBERTA CAREGIVER WEBSITE

Alberta Health Services – Family Caregiver Centre

<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/services/Page13155.aspx>

This is a very comprehensive website with excellent general information about caregiving and links to other resources in Alberta.

SASKATCHEWAN CAREGIVER WEBSITE

Saskatoon Council on Aging and Caregiver Resources

<https://www.scoa.ca/caregiver-resources>

BRITISH COLUMBIA CAREGIVER WEBSITE

Family Caregivers of British Columbia

<https://www.familycaregiversbc.ca/caregiver-learning-center>

Wonderful website with information and further resources in BC.

NEWFOUNDLAND CAREGIVER SITES

Bridge the gapp

<https://nl.bridgethegapp.ca/adult/knowledge-centre/caregivers-caregiving/>

Extensive Caregiver Information and Support – Adult and Youth

Caregiving Resources In Newfoundland

<https://canadiancaregiving.org/resources/caregiver-resources/>

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND CAREGIVING SITES

<https://www.princeedwardisland.ca/en/topic/caring-for-aging-parents>

Information about adult day care programs.

<https://hospicepei.ca/caregiver-support-resources/>

Additional Caregiving Resources in P.E.I.

SECTION 5: RESOURCE GUIDE

NOVA SCOTIA CAREGIVING SITES

Caregivers Nova Scotia

<https://caregiversns.org/who-we-are/>

This organization offers a very comprehensive site with information about caregiving, long-term care options, government assistance and more. Membership in the organization is also free.

Respite and Caregiver Support Nova Scotia

<https://www.nshealth.ca/clinics-programs-and-services/respice-and-caregiver-support>

Caregiver Benefit Information

<https://novascotia.ca/dhw/ccs/home-care.asp>

NEW BRUNSWICK CAREGIVING SITES

Homecare Services

<https://nbhc.ca/home-care-services>

Caregiver's Guide

https://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/departments/social_development/seniors/content/caregivers_guide.html

This New Brunswick Caregiver's guide provides information to government support and services for the caregiver.

NORTHWEST TERRITORIES CAREGIVING SITES

Continuing Care Service Information

<https://www.hss.gov.nt.ca/en/services/continuing-care-services>

Homecare Services for People of All Ages

<https://www.nthssa.ca/en/services/home-care>

NUNAVUT CAREGIVING SITES

Understanding Caregiver Needs in Nunavut

<https://canadiancaregiving.org/caregivers-in-nunavut/>

Home and Community Care Programs

<https://nu.211.ca/detail/71252637/>

YUKON CAREGIVING WEBSITE

Homecare for individuals of all ages

<https://www.chpca.ca/listing/yukon-home-care-and-palliative-care-program/>

Congratulations on the completion of *The Caregiver's Toolkit*! We're grateful for the time and effort you've invested in exploring these resources.

Your next step is to take mindful action. This toolkit is here to support you whenever you need guidance, comfort, or inspiration. As you move forward, remember that meaningful change is rarely linear, and takes time and patience. Consider beginning with small, intentional steps, and always extend kindness to yourself.

If you found this toolkit to be helpful, we encourage you to share it with other caregivers who may benefit from it.

Need more support? Hydrocephalus Canada and Recreational Respite are here to offer additional resources and services to assist you on your caregiving journey.

Thank you for all that you do!

Contact Information:



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