

# THE CAREGIVERS COMPANION

SELF-CARE FOR HEALTH *in Mind, Body & Spirit*

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## JOURNALING THROUGH THE PROCESS

- Journaling is a self-care technique that can help you heal, grow and thrive.
  - Journaling helps bring order to your deepest thoughts and fears. It creates order out of chaos.
  - Journaling acts as free therapy. It helps you have a conversation with the person who knows you best: you.
  - You can go back and track your progress. Read what you've written and see how much progress you've made on your journey.
  - Some find joy in knowing their words help others, so they share their healing. But whether or not you share your work is up to you.
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### A NOTE TO THE READER:

This journaling guide can be used along with The Caregivers Companion or as a stand-alone tool. Print it out and keep it near your journal to inspire self-reflection. It's up to you whether you'd like to go through the prompts in order or based on your interests that day. If you don't like to write, consider using a prompt as a discussion starter with a trusted friend.

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## PART 1: THE BODY-MIND-SPIRIT CONNECTION

Make a list of three qualities you have that you consider weaknesses, and then explore how these so-called weaknesses might be recast as strengths. For instance, if you believe micro-management is a weakness of yours, it could also mean that you're organized and responsible. Once you determine the strength on the flip-side of that quality, write about a time when you used that quality in a positive way. If you can't think of a recent example, write something aspirational (how could you use this quality positively in the future).



Write about a moment when you felt a particular emotion and how you physically experienced it. Were your palms sweating? Was your heart racing or head throbbing? How did you interact with your environment through all your senses? What did you see hear, or smell? By expressing your emotional state through your physical experience of it, you're able to delve into the heart of it. You can also write about your current state: What emotions are you experiencing right now, and what's the physical manifestation?

**Who am I? Part 1:** List five qualities of your personality or your outlook that you think define you. Write just one word/phrase/sentence for each—not a summary of your whole life. Don't overthink. What rises to surface as important *now*? You can even do this prompt periodically to see how the list changes. Then expand on the qualities, writing about each of those aspects of you.



**Who am I? Part 2:** List five roles or labels that you think define you. Write just one word/ phrase/sentence for each. Don't over-think. What rises to surface as important *now*? You can even do this prompt periodically to see how the list changes. Then expand on the roles/labels, writing about each of those aspects of you.



**Who am I? Part 3:** List five important experiences in your life that you think define you. Write just one word/ phrase/sentence for each. Don't over think. What is important *now*? You can even do this prompt periodically, to see how the list changes. Then expand on these experiences, exploring the effect they had on who you fundamentally are.



Think of a real or an imaginary place where you feel safe and at peace. Create that place in your mind and write a detailed description of it using all your senses—what you see in this place, but also what you hear, smell, taste and feel through tactile contact. You can then use this as a visualized meditation, closing your eyes, breathing and imagining this place thoroughly, one sense at a time.

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## PART 2: CHOOSING HEALTH

What role does food play in your life? Are you filling an emotional void with food or drink, using it as a friend?



Describe a recent food craving. Were you really hungry? Scan your body for its food needs. What does hunger or fullness feel like right now?



What are some positive family traditions that you would like to return to or begin? Are there any unhealthy traditions that you can change or let go of altogether?



List five things that you're grateful for—this list can include people, positive experiences (past or current), places, material items—then expand on each one, describing it/him/her in detail, perhaps at a particular time when you were interacting with it.

List three activities that bring you joy. Expand on each activity, describing a recent time when you fully engaged in it. If you're finding it challenging to engage in these activities as often as you'd like or need, explore strategies for working them into your schedule more often.



List two things you tend to say yes to or have said yes to recently and two things you tend to say no to or have said no to recently. For each pair, choose one yes and one no that are good self care, and one yes and one no that perhaps aren't. For example, saying yes can be a way of embracing an opportunity and engaging with the world (good self-care), but it can also be a way of spreading yourself too thin. Saying no can help you maintain healthy boundaries and manage your time (good self-care), but it can also isolate you and cause you to miss opportunities. Also keep in mind that saying yes to one thing usually means saying no to something else and vice versa—this awareness can help you prioritize, and determine the value of things and what's truly important to you.



List three positive qualities/strengths that you value in yourself. Then list three qualities that you aspire to achieve. Expand on each quality. For the qualities you already have, what are recent examples when you showcased them? For the qualities you aspire to, how might you achieve them?

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## PART 3: YOUR CIRCLE OF SUPPORT

**Relationships, Part 1:** Think about a positive relationship in your life that feeds you. Describe it, identifying and exploring what specifically about that connection nourishes you.



**Relationships, Part 2:** Think about a negative relationship that drains you. Describe it, identifying and exploring what the particular issues are. Are these issues that 1. You can accept, 2. You can work on or 3. May mean you should let this person go altogether?



Write a letter to your wounded warrior. What is on your mind and in your heart that you find hard to express in real life, perhaps because it's emotionally uncomfortable? You may find that expressing it on the page is useful preparation for expressing it aloud. You also may find it useful as a private exercise to work out your thoughts and feelings on your own in order to interact with him or her more productively in general.



List one goal for today, one for this week, one for this month and one for this year. Then expand on each, exploring the support you may need to achieve those goals, strategies, potential barriers, etc., and how to overcome them.

There's an intrinsic relationship among our thoughts, emotions and behaviors. Chart your thoughts, emotions and behaviors over the past month, listing two predominant examples for each. What effect did your thoughts, emotions and behaviors have on one another? And how did your changes in each category affect the other two?



Think of one thing that you need right now. Write out how you might most effectively communicate that need to a particular person. Then write out what you imagine that person's response will be.



Think of a recent conversation with your wounded warrior. First, write out what was said, verbatim. Then describe what was communicated nonverbally—facial expressions, body language, posture, etc.—by both of you. Were your words and actions in sync or at odds? Which was the true expression?



Think of two recent conversations—one that went well and one that went poorly. In each case, explore the positive and negative aspects to determine what specifically contributed to it going well or poorly.



Think about two group experiences—one that helped you, and one that didn't. Explore each to determine why they were effective or not. What was a particular incident in the positive group experience that was especially enlightening? What were you seeking in the other group and why, specifically, was it unable to deliver?

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## **PART 4: SURROUND YOURSELF WITH CARE**

Identify where you spend most of your time: In your car? At home, work or school? Compare and contrast these places to the safe space you created earlier. Then explore what adjustments you might make to these real places and your interaction with them to render them more nurturing, safe and peaceful.



Describe your home before and after your service member returned, identifying the changes you made to that environment. Determine whether those changes are truly serving you as well as your service member and explore what further adjustments you might make to render the home environment more nurturing, safe and peaceful for both of you.



List three changes in your work situation and describe them, exploring both how they affected you and how you compensated for these changes.



What new skills have you learned as a caregiver that you can bring into your current workplace or a new career?

Describe your current medical care: When was the last time you got a check-up? Are there any chronic problems that need to be addressed? Identify any obstacles you encounter to getting regular check-ups and explore what support you need or changes you could make to overcome them.



When your loved one is receiving care, ask yourself, “What is it about this place that bothers me? What sights, sounds, smells and tactile sensations do I have control over? How could this be a better experience for me and my loved one?”



Write a letter to yourself. What advice or reassurance would you tell yourself when you were just starting on this journey of caregiving?

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