



WORK AND CAREGIVING: A BALANCING ACT

Toolkit for Working Caregivers



Across Ontario there are 3.3 million caregivers; ordinary people who are caring for family members, partners, friends and neighbours who have physical and/or mental health needs. While many find the role fulfilling, the added responsibility of providing care often impacts the physical and mental health of caregivers themselves.

The **Ontario Caregiver Organization** exists to support caregivers, regardless of age, diagnosis or where they live.

Our **24/7 Caregiver Helpline** provides a single point of access to information, support and services so caregivers are empowered with the information they need to be successful.

If you are a caregiver in need of support and information, call the **Ontario Caregiver Helpline at 1-833-416-2273**.

You can also access help through our weekday live chat and resources on our website www.ontariocaregiver.ca.

We would like to thank the advisory group of caregivers who provided advice and input to support the development of this toolkit. We would also like to acknowledge the Canadian Mental Health Association, Ontario for their collaboration on our Caregivers in the Workplace initiative.



This resource is meant to provide caregivers with general information, tips and tools as they balance work and caregiving responsibilities. It is not a substitute for individual medical, financial, legal and career advice from professionals.

The views expressed in this toolkit are the views of The Ontario Caregiver Organization and do not necessarily reflect those of the Province.



More than two thirds of caregivers are employed. It can be like juggling two full-time jobs at once.

Working caregivers are ordinary people trying to balance work and caregiving demands. You play an invaluable role in the lives of those you care for, while taking on many different tasks in addition to work responsibilities. While most caregivers have a positive outlook on this experience and a sense of fulfilment, many admit that they had no choice but to assume the work of caregiving and rely on their job to both earn a living and have a sense of purpose.

If you are finding it hard to balance work and caregiving, you are not alone.

Regardless of why or how you became a caregiver, there are many emotions that arise from managing work and caregiving responsibilities. Working caregivers are often stretched thin. It is impossible to be in two places at once, and your responsibilities at work may compete with your caregiving role. At work, you may find yourself worried about the person you care for and when you are at home, you may be stressed thinking about work. Financial worries can mean additional pressure. Many working caregivers wish they had more support from their employer to manage their work and caregiving responsibilities.

If you are looking for ways to find better balance and support, you can use this toolkit inspired by working caregivers, their stories and their unique experiences.



About
45% of caregivers
find balancing caregiving with work stressful.
35% are worried about losing their job.



HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT

This toolkit was designed to help you manage the competing needs of work and caregiving while taking care of your own health and happiness at the same time.

Caregiving needs change over time – you may need to re-assess and problem-solve a few times to better manage work, caregiving and your own needs. You can revisit the sections of this toolkit as your needs continue to evolve.

This toolkit provides practical tools and tips to help you find solutions that could work for you and your employer. You will learn about ideas to help you manage caregiving, options to explore greater flexibility and support at work, and tips for talking with your employer about solutions. Using this toolkit will help you understand the importance of taking care of yourself and your own mental health, in order to find better balance in juggling the demands of being a working caregiver.

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MANAGING YOUR CAREGIVING ROLE

It can be hard to accept that you can't do it all. Caregivers sometimes feel pressure or guilt for not being able to do it all. You may feel that others – at work or at home – are judging you or you may be putting pressure on yourself. Be easy on yourself – being a working caregiver may mean that you are managing two jobs at the same time! The first step is recognizing that you may need help.

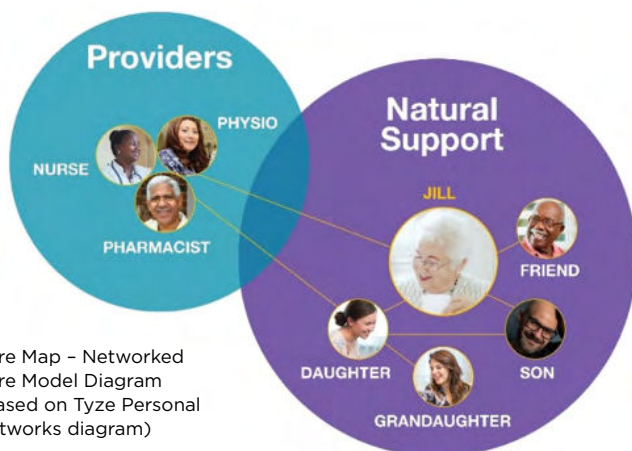
Before making adjustments at work, think about the ways to relieve the pressure of your caregiving role:

- 1) Build your care team
- 2) Identify where you need support
- 3) Find services and support that can help

BUILDING YOUR CARE TEAM

Your care recipient can have a team of supporters. Their healthcare providers, community services, family, friends and neighbours can all contribute to providing care. If you are the primary caregiver, you are the leader of this team. It is important to think of yourself this way as you coordinate, manage and ask for the support you need in fulfilling their care needs.

Who is on your care team? Consider drawing it out as a Care Map like the one below.



Care Map – Networked Care Model Diagram
(Based on Tyze Personal Networks diagram)

Often, caregiving responsibilities fall on the shoulders of one or two people. Sometimes, it's family members – daughters, sons, partners, parents, siblings and friends, or someone closer to the care recipient – geographically or emotionally. It is important for caregivers to think about whether or not they have taken on too much, and if it is time to ask for help from others to share responsibility and reduce the burden.

IDENTIFY WHERE YOU NEED SUPPORT - CAREGIVING CHECKLIST

Take an inventory of what you do as a caregiver. Mark which tasks you manage and the resources you are currently using. This might include support you receive from other family members or community groups. This exercise will give you a better picture of all the tasks you are managing, the supports you are using and where you need extra help.

	Activities	I perform this task	Who can help?	When/How often is this done?
Personal Care	Bathing			
	Dressing			
	Eating/feeding			
	Foot/mouth care			
	Toileting			
	Lifting/transferring			
	Grooming (shaving, hair care)			
	Medication management			
	Medical procedures or equipment management			
Help Around the House	Light housekeeping			
	Cleaning bathroom and floors			
	Laundry			
	Meal planning/preparation			
	Gardening/snow shoveling			
	Care for pets/plants			
	Check mail			
	Sort recycling/waste disposal			
Transportation/ Shopping	Drive care recipient to activities/appointments			
	Take care recipient shopping			
	Fill prescriptions			
	Car maintenance			
	Coordinating care			
Psycho-Social Support	Check in by phone			
	In-person visits			
	Leisure activities			
Financial/Legal Affairs	Banking, pay bills			
	Legal documents			
	Income taxes			
Other				

*This checklist has been used with permission from Caregivers Nova Scotia

FIND SERVICES AND SUPPORT

In addition to asking family and friends for help with caregiving, it is good to be aware of community services and supports.

You can start your search by contacting the **Ontario Caregiver Helpline at 1-833-416-2273** or accessing help through our weekday live chat and resources on our website www.ontariocaregiver.ca.

SERVICES AND SUPPORTS FOR CAREGIVERS MAY INCLUDE:	
<p>Taking a Break from Caregiving (Respite Care)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Can be provided on a short-term or on-going basis.✓ Respite can be in the home, at day programs, or during a short stay in a long-term care location.✓ Respite care may be provided free or for a fee.	<p>Homecare Services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Services include home-nursing, personal care, light housekeeping or friendly visitors.✓ Homecare services may be provided free or for a fee.
<p>Community Resources, Information and Education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Caregiver courses, workshops and online education.✓ Information about caring for someone with a specific condition.✓ Support from spiritual or religious groups.✓ Access to resources, services and programs through health or disease specific organizations.	<p>Technology</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Apps that can help with scheduling tasks across multiple people.✓ Blogs and other platforms to keep friends and family up to date (with permission).✓ Technology that supports communication with care providers or the care-receiver.



>50% of caregivers find the process of organizing care difficult.

(2019 Spotlight Report on Ontario's Caregivers)

MAKING IT WORK AT WORK

You may feel that continuing to work and give care is an impossible task, but there are many things you can do to help you achieve better balance. Getting more help for your caregiving role can be part of the solution. Many caregivers also find that taking time off or requesting a change to how, when, or where you get your work done can make it easier.

This section of the toolkit will help you to explore your options, identify potential solutions, and have the conversation about job-related changes that could work for both you and your employer.

5 STEPS FOR MAKING IT WORK AT WORK



1. LEARN ABOUT OPTIONS THAT MAY BE AVAILABLE TO YOU

This section provides you with examples of workplace practices that can make it easier for caregivers to continue fulfilling their job responsibilities. Every workplace is different, and every caregiving situation is different. It is important that you also do your own homework to educate yourself about the benefits and support that might be available to you, including:

- Reading Human Resource policies and benefit packages provided by your employer.
- Talking to your manager, HR department or union because flexible solutions are not always included in formal policies.
- Finding out if you are eligible for leave benefits and financial assistance offered by the government (see page 9).

OPTIONS FOR FLEXIBLE WORKING ARRANGEMENTS

If your regular work schedule is making it challenging to balance your caregiving and job responsibilities, flexible working arrangements may be part of the solution. Here are some examples to consider:

It is important that you do your own homework to educate yourself about the benefits and supports available.

Flexible work hours	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Early or late start• Work longer days/weeks to make up for time off
Shift work	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ability to change work shifts• Split shifts to provide time for caregiving between shifts• Employers may have an online scheduling system that allows employees to log in for shift requests/changes
Working remotely	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Work from home or other location• Employers may provide technology to support off-site work (laptops, remote access to email and documents, etc.)
Reduced work hours	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Working less than regular work week
Job sharing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sharing duties can make it easier to have back-up coverage during absence from work
Phased retirement	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reduced work hours during transition to retirement

PAID, UNPAID LEAVE AND BENEFITS

Employment Insurance (EI) Caregiving Benefits and Leave	<p>You may be eligible to receive financial assistance through EI to help you take time away from work to provide care or support to a child or adult who is critically ill or injured.</p> <p>For more information: canada.ca and search “Caregiving Benefits and Leave”</p>
Employment Insurance (EI) Compassionate Care Benefits and Leave	<p>You may be eligible to receive financial assistance through EI to help you take time away from work to provide care or support of someone who requires end-of-life care.</p> <p>For more information: canada.ca and search “Compassionate Care Leave”</p>
Unpaid Leave with Job Protection	<p>Under the Employee Standards Act in Ontario, you may be eligible for unpaid, job-protected leave through Family Caregiver Leave, Family Medical Leave, or Critical Illness Leave.</p> <p>For more information: ontario.ca and search “Your Guide to Employment Standards Act”</p>
Paid or Unpaid Leave Options That May be Available in Your Workplace	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Short/long term leave (paid or unpaid)• Personal days or sick day policies that can be used for caregiving• Vacation days (but remember you may need your own break!)• May be within formal HR policies or offered informally

EMPLOYERS MAY OFFER A RANGE OF PROGRAMS AND RESOURCES FOR EMPLOYEES INCLUDING:

- EAP (employee assistance programs) may include care referral services or counselling.
- Permission for employees to be reachable at work by personal phone/text/email.
- Access to a private room for caregiving conversations.
- Emergency Elder Care or back-up care.
- On-site Lunch and Learns.
- Referrals or online information about caregiving resources.

2. ASSESS OPTIONS THAT COULD WORK

While there are many options for changes at work that can make it easier for you to work while caregiving, there is no “one-size-fits-all” solution. Once you have learned about possible solutions, you will need to identify the ones that could work best for you, your job, and your employer. This Decision Aid Tool may be helpful as you go through this process.

DECISION AID TOOL TO ASSESS YOUR OPTIONS

Think and Reflect:

What support or changes at work would help me manage working and caregiving?

What support or changes at work would help me fulfil my job responsibilities?

Do I need to plan ahead for emergency/unplanned absences?

	Would this be helpful to me? (✓)	Could this work for my employer? (✓)
Flexible work hours – early or late start		
Flexible hours - work longer to make up for time off		
Ability to change work shifts		
Split shifts to have caregiving time between shifts		
Work remotely from home or another location		
Technology to support working remotely		
Reduced work hours		
Job sharing or back-up support for my duties		
Phased retirement – reduced hours during transition		
Short-term leave		
Longer-term leave		
Access to my personal phone or a private room at work		
Other workplace benefits (ie: emergency elder care or back-up care)		
Other:		
Other:		

From the list above, what are the 1 or 2 changes that would be most helpful to me?

What would need to happen in order to make this possible for me?

What would need to happen in order to make this work for my employer?

3. HAVE THE DISCUSSION WITH YOUR EMPLOYER

It can be difficult to tell your employer about your caregiving role. Many of us prefer to keep our personal lives separate from work. However, a conversation can open the door to more flexibility or benefits and gives the opportunity for your manager to be supportive. You may prefer to start the discussion with your HR department.

Planning ahead is critical. Take the time to think about what you want to share, what you are asking for, and how to make your request in a way that increases your chances of a good outcome. Here are some suggestions of what to include in your discussion:

- Commitment to your job
- Information about your caregiving situation
- Your request or ideas
- How it could work for your employer / minimize disruption of work
- Other suggestions your employer may have
- Agreement on next steps

If you have a job with many responsibilities, the **Work Plan Template** on the next page may be a helpful tool to prepare and bring to your meeting.

Knowing that a caregiving crisis will not become a crisis at work can make it easier for both you and your employer. Think about how you can plan ahead for unexpected absences or emergency situations.

Be open to different ideas and be prepared to be flexible and compromise.

Tips to Increase Your Chances of Getting Support from Your Employer

- ✓ **Book time** to discuss privately, preferably face-to-face.
- ✓ **Keep the message simple** when you ask for the meeting - save the details until you meet.
- ✓ **Get input** from someone you trust in advance.
- ✓ **Share your commitment** to your job and the organization.
- ✓ **Be open** to different ideas and be prepared to be flexible and compromise.
- ✓ **Be realistic.**
- ✓ **Consider your employer's needs.**
- ✓ **Bring notes or written outlines** that can support your discussion (example: Workplan).
- ✓ **Be patient.** Ask when it is reasonable for you to check back for an answer.
- ✓ **Follow up in writing** to thank your manager and confirm your discussion. Some requests may need to be made in writing.

If you have multiple responsibilities in your job, they may require different solutions. A written Work Plan may be helpful for you to plan and present solutions for each of your work duties. This can help you and your manager agree on how you will get the work done, and plan for any areas where you need to step back.

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES WORK PLAN

Request for changes at work:

What are the key solutions I believe could work: Reduced hours? Time off? Shift change? Emergency plan? Remote work? Flex hours?

Key work duties <i>(list below)</i>	Changes that could support me in completing this duty <i>What arrangements could help me manage this work? How, when and where will I get this work done?</i>	Possible solutions for duties that I may not be able to fulfil <i>Are there alternate duties I can do instead? Are there other people/ways to get this work done?</i>
<i>Example: Writing weekly reports</i>	<i>Can be completed remotely from home</i>	
<i>Example: Launching new project</i>		<i>Consider deferring launch of project or sharing responsibility with co-worker</i>

Other notes:

4. IMPLEMENT WORK CHANGES

If you have successfully made changes at work to find better balance, well done. Change is never easy. Give yourself time to adjust. It is also important to recognize that your new working arrangements may also impact your manager and co-workers.

While sharing is always a personal decision, you may want to tell others at work so that they have a greater understanding of your caregiving role and can be more supportive. Chances are, many of them will relate to your experience.

5. REVIEW AND RE-ASSESS

You and your manager will need to touch base regularly to see if your solutions are working. Your caregiving role could also change, making it necessary to re-assess.

If you are thinking of leaving work, don't make quick decisions. Employers value skilled, experienced and committed staff. You may be surprised by what your employer may offer if they know you are considering leaving.

Sometimes as working caregivers, we need to let go of some personal dreams to manage caregiving roles. This could involve not applying for promotion, being passed up for an opportunity, or scaling back your job to better manage working and caregiving. This sense of loss is often difficult and can mean grieving "what could have been." Having these feelings is common and normal.

You may decide that combining work and care is simply too much and you must temporarily leave or resign from your job. Try to stay connected to your colleagues and industry. If you want to return to work, think about the skills you have developed undertaking your caregiving role that may be valued by employers.



20% of all caregivers have admitted to having a difficult time managing work, have reduced their hours or left the workforce to manage their caregiving duties.

"The life experience of caregiving teaches us about resilience which makes us great at adapting in work situations. We also learn how to be flexible and have good judgement because caregiving provides us with a level of perspective, insight and wisdom that workplaces often seek in their employees."

- Carrie, Caregiver

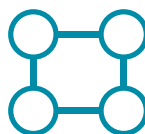
CARING FOR YOURSELF

Being a caregiver can have an impact on your own health and wellness, as well as your relationships with family and friends. It also impacts the time and energy you have for your work and career.

Caring for yourself is as important as caring for someone else and will make it easier for you to balance work and caregiving. Caregivers often face negative stress or burnout, but there are things you can do to reduce the risk:



Eat right – Balanced nutrition is essential to keeping up your own health and energy.



Set boundaries – Stay focused and separate time for work, care and you, so you can ‘work when you work’, ‘give care when caregiving’ and ‘play when you play’.



Exercise – Moving your body helps alleviate depression and increases your strength.



Prioritize – Don’t set unrealistic expectations for yourself and determine what is most and least important to avoid feeling overwhelmed.



Sleep – It may be hard to get 7-9 hours a night but rest is key to maintaining resiliency and proper functioning.



Connect – Finding someone to talk to, such as a friend, family member or peer supporter ensures you don’t feel isolated or alone when things are tough.



Make time for your own health needs – Make time to see your own healthcare provider to stay healthy and strong.



YOUR EMOTIONS AND MOOD

While most caregivers have a positive outlook on their experience and a sense of fulfilment, two-thirds admit they had no choice but to assume the work of caregiving.

You may feel tired, frustrated, anxious, overwhelmed, sad, lonely, resentful or angry. If you are struggling to keep up with work and caregiving demands, it is not uncommon to have feelings of guilt or failure. You are human and not a superhero but admitting that you have hit your limit can be tough.

These are all normal feelings and may be a part of your caregiving experience. Your mood is responding to how you are feeling about your circumstances. Having a healthy mood doesn't mean that you don't get sad sometimes. Mood will normally respond to these circumstances and regulate itself so that you begin to feel better after a moderate amount of time.

A sign that you are experiencing good mental health is that you're able to enjoy life and your relationships, cope with normal stressors we all face, and work productively and fruitfully – whether that is work at your job or caregiving duties. Having good mental health means we are better able to handle stress, and solve problems as they arise at work, at home and in our relationships.

SIGNS THAT LOW MOOD OR STRESS MAY BE A CONCERN

Sometimes negative feelings, stress or low mood continue and it's important to be aware and take action if these occur. Signs that you may be experiencing low mood, anxiety or clinical depression are:

- Lack of interest in things you typically enjoy
- Feeling dull, drained, extremely tired or irritable on a regular basis
- Withdrawing from social circles and friends
- Thinking or saying negative things about yourself
- Feeling hopeless, or despair that lasts longer than a couple of weeks
- Regularly feeling irritable, or angry – even when you don't mean to
- A sense of dread, or overwhelming anxiety
- Racing heart, tightness in the chest or throat, or an inability to sit still
- Panic attacks

It can be hard at first, but the good news is that low mood and anxiety can often be addressed with the right supports and activities. Regular walks outside, frequent connections with friends or family, talking to your primary care provider, and finding support groups that connect you to others experiencing similar things can help.

If you find yourself having more bad days than good days, and over a period of about a month, that may be an indicator to talk to a health professional as a step towards feeling better.





HOW TO ASK FOR SUPPORT FOR YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

Sometimes, we can feel overwhelmed or unsure of where to turn for our mental health. When that's the case, it's important to reach out to people whom we trust. If you think you may be experiencing anxiety, depression, poor mental health or mental illness, take the following steps:

1. Talk to your family doctor about your concerns.
2. Speak with a close and trusted friend or family member.
3. Reach out to a local Canadian Mental Health Association branch to see if they have programs that could benefit you.
4. Practice self-care, and keep a journal about how you are feeling – this can help a doctor find the right supports in your community.
5. Contact a crisis service or mental health service if you feel hopeless or lost.

It is important to know that 1 in 2 of us will experience a mental health concern before the age of 40. This doesn't mean we are weaker, or unable to do everything we want to do in our lives. Just as you would go to your doctor about a particularly bad stomach pain, reaching out for mental health support is important.

SOME RESOURCES WE RECOMMEND YOU CONNECT WITH ARE:

ConnexOntario: Provides information on mental health and addictions services wherever you live. They can be reached at **1-866-531-2600**.

Canadian Mental Health Association: Provides community based mental health support to all Ontarians. Visit www.cmha.ca/find-your-cmha to get real time information on your nearest branch.

If you are in **crisis or thinking about harming yourself**, we recommend calling the **Canadian Suicide Prevention Service** at **1-833-456-4566**. You can also chat via text, by sending a message to **45645**.



CMHA Ontario has a program available to every Ontarian experiencing concerns with mood or depression. BounceBack™ is a cognitive-behavioural therapy based coaching program which connects you with professionals regardless of where you live. It is free and you can self refer! Visit www.bouncebackontario.ca.



Whether you are new to caregiving or well-experienced, OCO's 1:1 Peer Support Program can match you to other caregivers who have walked a similar path. Get connected with a peer mentor by visiting www.ontariocaregiver.ca.

STAY CONNECTED WITH THE ONTARIO CAREGIVER ORGANIZATION

The Ontario Caregiver Organization hopes this toolkit helps you find ways to balance work and caregiving responsibilities, while taking the time to stay healthy and strong for yourself. Working provides financial support for you and your family, but it can also be rewarding and fulfilling. We hope you stay connected with us and find out about the many supports we are continuing to add for working caregivers.

Join the conversation on social media!



<https://www.facebook.com/caregiverON>



<https://twitter.com/caregiverON>



<https://www.linkedin.com/company/the-ontario-caregiver-organization/>



<https://www.instagram.com/ontariocaregiver/>

Learn about volunteer opportunities and share your story by visiting the 'Get Involved' section on our website: www.ontariocaregiver.ca

**The Ontario Caregiver Organization is committed to working with caregivers.
We value the knowledge and insight of those with caregiving experience.**

Share your feedback and suggestions for future editions of this toolkit, including any tips you may have for balancing work and caregiving by emailing: info@ontarocaregiver.ca.



www.ontariocaregiver.ca/workplace