

# Caregiver Healing Journal

## Volume I: Gathering



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Mothers on the Frontline is non-profit organization. Our mission is to promote children's mental health justice, caregiver justice, and caregiver healing through storytelling. Our vision is a world in which all children are safe and able to thrive because their unique educational, social, emotional and health needs are genuinely met.

We are an all-volunteer non-profit 501(c)(3) organization. Our work is made possible through generous tax-deductable donations from individuals like you.



Please consider making a donation today. Thank you to those who have supported us in the past, making this offering possible.

Platinum  
Transparency  
2025

**Candid.**



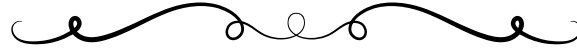
MOTHERS ON THE FRONTLINE

# Acknowledgements

## Gratitude to our Wisdom Collective

We would like to thank all of the mothers, caregivers, educators, and children's mental health professionals who have shared their stories in Mothers on the Frontline gatherings, podcast interviews, and workshops. Thank you for your contributions to this Wisdom Collective. Your stories have informed the prompts in this journal. We would like to give special gratitude to Susan Sanning for co-creating and co-facilitating a caregiver workshop with us in the summer of 2023 that further refined some of the material in this series and Sage Gladstone, a volunteer through the Grinnell College Service Leadership Work-Study Program for her contributions to the design of many of the pages in the series.

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This journal is dedicated to  
all who mother children with mental health conditions.

We see you.

We know that your child is not your burden,  
they are your joy.

Your burden is a world  
that was not designed for your child,  
a world that can be cruel and uncaring  
to your child  
and to you.

We see you navigating  
this world  
with your child,  
for your child.

We know the isolation, the pain, the worry.

You are not alone.

# Who We Are

At our most fundamental level we are three close friends who share the lived experience of parenting children with mental health conditions, neurodevelopmental disorders and other complex medical needs. It was from our many conversations that we discovered the commonality of the damaging and traumatic experiences our families endured as we did everything in our power to get accurate diagnoses, inclusive education, and access to scarce services and treatment for our children.

Our friendship served to protect us against the isolation and hopelessness that overwhelms many parents, caregivers and families in our situation. We helped each other recognize and name the things that were happening to us. We understood each other's fear, pain, anger, love, hope and joy in ways that only those with the same lived experience can truly know. We helped the others feel seen, heard and respected. Often for the first time. We helped each other heal.

We would not have survived without the love, support and the unique wisdom of the others.

Eventually, our conversations took on a different direction and we moved from how do we support each other to how do we best share what we've learned with others? From this sisterhood of survival Mothers on the Frontline was born.

Mothers on the Frontline is the first Children's Mental Health Justice focused organization. We are a 100% volunteer run. Our work aims to address and transform the long standing social, structural, and institutional injustices that harm our children, their caregivers, families and communities.



# Invitation For Solidarity With All Mothers

All people have the right to mental health care and mental well-being.

Mental health is a vital, integral part of the overall health and well-being of ALL children, families and communities.

All children with mental health conditions, their parents and caregivers, have the right to genuinely healing care and support that centers the expertise, wisdom and experiences of our children, families and communities.

We envision a world in which mental health is destigmatized, respected and prioritized.

We disrupt deeply entrenched narratives of motherblame, particularly the narratives surrounding motherhood of children with mental health conditions, through the healing power of storytelling.

We identify the structures, ideologies and practices that create obstacles to fully, effectively and compassionately care for our children, and identify the active harms that underpin much of our ill-being.

We imagine a world in which our children, families and communities are safe, valued, understood and respected. A world in which our children thrive because their unique educational, social, emotional and health needs are genuinely met. We imagine a world in which their beauty, joy, love, compassion and talents are the focus of their and our existence.

We could not do this healing work without the sacrifices, blood, sweat, tears, wisdom, and knowledge shared with us by trans-queer folx, people with disabilities, Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color and especially the women of these movements, our ancestors, mothers, grandmothers, aunts, sisters and friends.

We are humbled by their grace, fortitude, strength, kindness, and love and strive to uplift their voices with this work.

In the spirit of reciprocity and mutual responsibility we invite you, your families, communities and ancestors to join us on this journey of discovery, transformation and healing.



# Purpose of Journal

As your child's advocate, you spend so much time trying to help others understand your child's needs, it's all too easy to forget your own. This journal is not about your child, though you will write about and reflect on your journey caring for your child. This journal is about *you*, because you *matter*.

## You matter.

Take a moment to take that in.

You and your life matter - full stop.

This journal is about you, *your* story, *your* lived experience, *your* wisdom. Your story is connected with your child's - but your story is *not* your child's story.

That belongs to them. Your story belongs to you.

# How To Use Journal

Do what feels good for you. Write some, draw some, imagine some, dance some. Talk to a friend. Take some time and allow your thoughts to rise and fall. Take some rest. Breathe and just be.

This is an invitation to put aside a special time to reflect and write - whatever you can manage in the context of your life. We do not recommend powering through the whole journal at once. Give yourself time to let each writing sink in. There is no right or wrong way, there is just the best way for you. If you are interrupted, remember that is part of this journey - note it down and continue when possible. If you cannot take time to write, peak at the prompt and allow your mind to make a space for reflection as you do your tasks of the day. This is all about you making space for you.

These exercises are meant to be done individually. They are designed to center yourself and be present with your own thoughts and feelings, your own stories. However, you might chose to meet with a support group or gathering of other caregivers to discuss and share what arises for each of you after individually completing each section.







Before each writing or sharing session, we invite you read aloud the Invocation of Healing and do a grounding exercise.

## Invocation of Healing

When I am healed I feel  
seen, heard and respected.

When I am healed I am connected  
to myself, my children, family  
and community.

When I am healed I am grounded  
in my body, my spirituality, my knowing.

When I am healed I embody  
the joy, love, trust,  
surprise, curiosity  
and pleasure  
of my humanity, relationships and caregiving.

When I am healed I am whole.



MOTHERS ON THE FRONTLINE

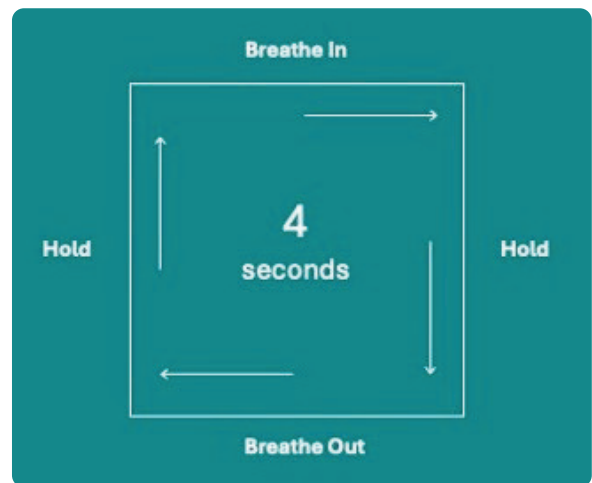
# Grounding Activities

Why do a grounding activity? This work involves a great deal of emotional labor and it is important that we care for our minds and bodies as we do it. Grounding activities help us settle our mind and be present in our body. An example of a grounding activity is provided below. Feel free to use any method of grounding that feels right to you.

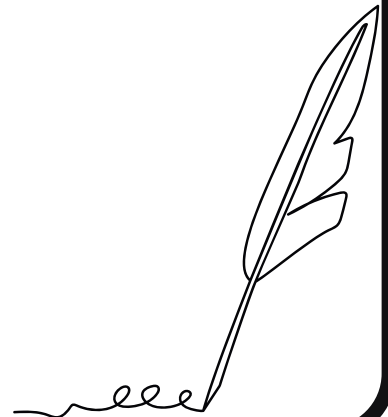
Get comfortable. This is the time to put any devices on Do Not Disturb. Take a few moments to get situated into your space. Grab a pillow, a sweater, a cup of tea and anything else that you might need to be comfortable and settled.

## Box Breathing

1. Breathe out slowly, releasing all the air in your lungs.
2. Breathe in through your nose while you slowly count to four in your mind. Be aware of your stomach rising.
3. Gently hold your breath for a count of four.
4. Gently exhale for a count of four.
5. Gently hold your breath again for a count of four.
6. Repeat three or four times.



What other grounding activities have worked well for me in the past or would I like to try?



# Gathering our Mother Stories

As you begin gathering your Mother Stories, take a moment to remember that you do not enter this journey alone. You are interconnected to the past, present, and future versions of yourself and equally importantly, to those who came before you, walk beside you now, and the person you will be and the people who will be with you in the yet undetermined future.

This present moment is influenced by all the women who came before you. Your ancestors, grandmothers, mothers, aunties, friends, teachers, and mentors. Their stories, your stories, are rich sources of knowledge and healing. Maybe some of those stories are of beauty, wisdom, love, strength and courage. Others will be cautionary tales filled with pain, hardship and deep sorrow.

Each of these stories has value.

Here we open space to tell the stories of the women who shaped you. Maybe it's a story of your grandmother and how she shared her love of baking with you. Maybe it's a cultural story of an ancestor you never met and that story gives you strength, or makes you cry.

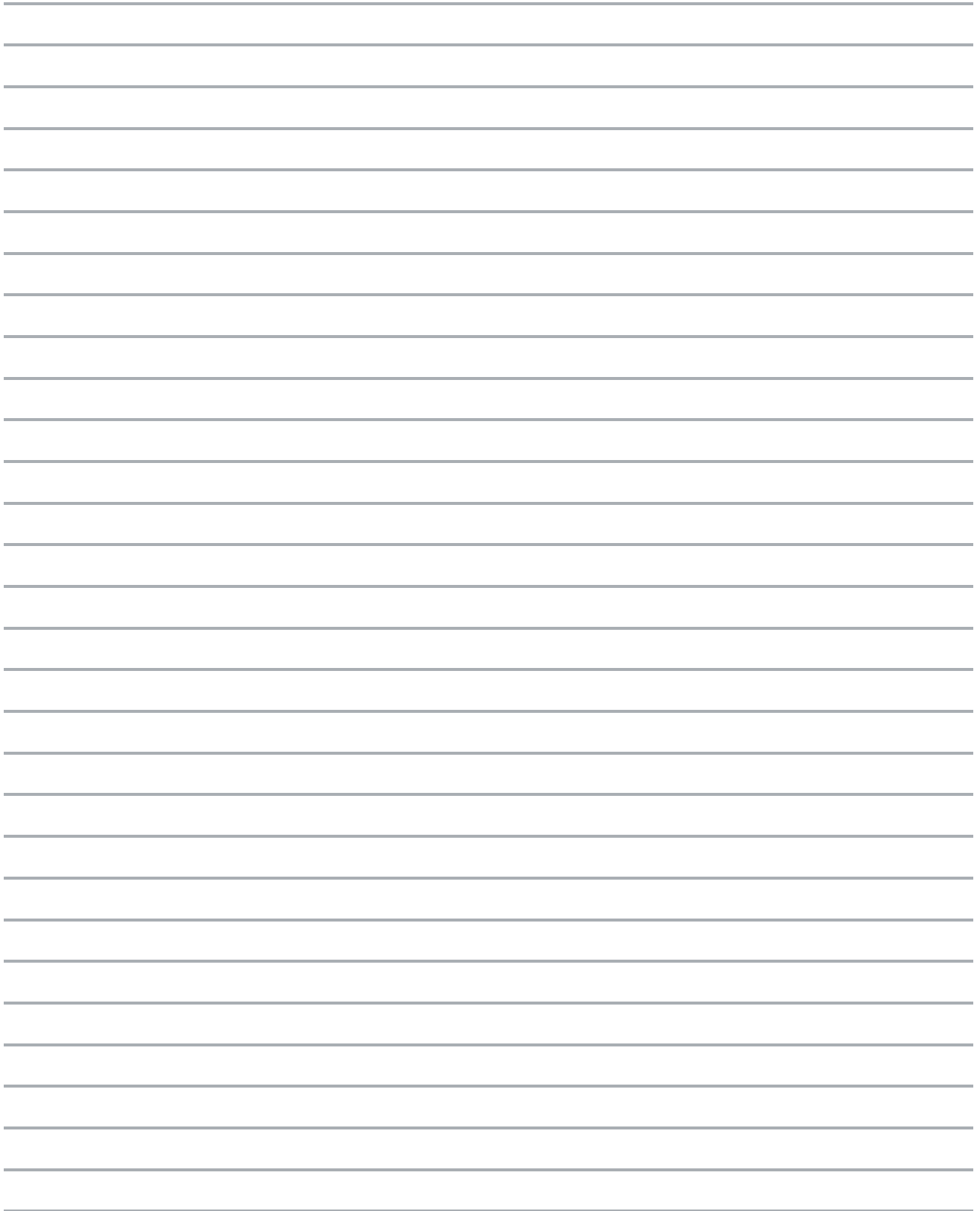
Here we open the space to remember and tell the stories of who you were before you became a mother.

Here we open space to remember and tell the stories of who you are outside of mothering.

Here we open space to remember the stories of how you became a mother.

Explore what comes up for you, listen to and embrace it. Do so without judgment. There are no right or wrong stories. Only your stories.

**Who are the women in your past that have influenced you? Share a story that speaks to you in this moment.**



[illegible]

## What do you value most about your mother?

This image shows a full page of blank, lined paper. It features approximately 20 evenly spaced horizontal grey lines across its entire width, providing a template for handwriting practice or general note-taking. The margins are consistent on all sides.

What wisdom did these women share with you?



A series of horizontal lines for writing, consisting of 25 lines in total, providing space for the user to write their response.



**What lessons, good or bad, did you learn from them?**

This image shows a full page of blank, lined paper. It features approximately 20 evenly spaced horizontal gray lines across its entire width, providing a template for writing or drawing. The background is a solid off-white color.



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.

**Is there any other story that needs sharing?**

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.

# The Woman You Were Before



Parenting (a child or children with complex medical needs) can be all consuming. So often we lose ourselves in all of the overwhelming duties and responsibilities of care. We don't have time to shower, or go to the gym, or have coffee with friends, or other "before" activities. Our caregiving work is largely invisible, unsupported, unpaid or underpaid. We must often give up our needs, hopes, dreams, time and energy so completely that we become ghosts in our own lives.

None of which diminishes our love or dedication to our beautiful children.

AND it is an absence, even a wound, that needs to be acknowledged, addressed and healed.

Here we make space to remember who you were before becoming a mother. An opportunity to reconnect to her so you may bring some of her hopes, dreams, needs, etc. into the present moment and into your future.

# Who was I before mothering?

[illegible]

What feelings come up as you think of the person you were before?



A series of horizontal lines for writing, consisting of 25 evenly spaced lines that span the width of the page, providing space for a user to write their response to the question above.



This image shows a full page of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page, typical of notebook paper. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the page.

Who am I outside of mothering?



A series of horizontal lines for writing, consisting of 25 evenly spaced lines that span the width of the page.

[illegible]



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.

[illegible]

# The Woman Who Will Be ...

Here we open a space for expansive imagining. A space to reflect on the woman you are now with all your wisdom, as you imagine what you could be if life let up.

Imagine that woman is coming.

Prepare for her.

What does she need from you? What would you tell her? Would you tell her stories of resilience? Of holding on? Of letting go? Of having faith in her intuition, of her knowing, of her truth?

Imagine her not as an impossibility, or some fixed future goal, but as a tether of hope that emerges from the freedom of dreaming. Root her in the possible.

Reach toward her.

Create her out of the tears and the muck  
the sweat and the blood  
the striving and the failing  
the love and the joy  
Speak her into existence  
Even if only as whispers in your mind

Share the dream of your future self. Give as much detail as you'd like. What does she look like? Where does she live? What have you prepared for her? What stories and wisdom will you share with her?

[illegible]



[illegible]

# Caregiving Healing Journal Series

