Caregiver Journey

You may have heard that "caregiving is a journey," but how that journey is experienced varies from one individual to another.

Stage 1: Expectant Caregiver

In the first stage, **caregiving is anticipatory**. You are not actively caring for someone, but know that the need may be approaching, perhaps due to aging or health complications. This is the time to **educate** yourself, have care **conversations** with your loved one, and get **organized**.

Stage 2: Freshman Caregiver

The second stage begins when you start **helping your loved one with tasks** such as meals, errands, and doctor's visits. It's crucial to learn more about their health conditions and available support as care needs increase. In the second stage, you should **build a care plan**, look into **support services**, and **set boundaries** to avoid burnout.

Stage 3: Entrenched Caregiver

In stage three, **routines** have been established and you may not have as many questions as before. This is often when caregivers notice their own **health suffering** from prolonged stress, a phase that can last **several years**. You must **prioritize your well-being** during this time. **Ask for help** from others, and try to **be flexible** as care needs change.

Stage 4: Transitioning Caregiver

Stage four of caregiving occurs when you realize your role may be **nearing its end**, whether because your loved one's needs have grown beyond what you can provide, they no longer need assistance, or you're facing an impending loss. **Acknowledge** the different emotions you feel during this time, start making **after-care arrangements**, and focus on spending **quality time** with your loved one.

Stage 5: No Longer a Caregiver

In stage five, your caregiving role concludes, leading to a unique period, where feelings of grief may be accompanied by feelings of relief. Allowing yourself to grieve is crucial for accepting the past and moving forward with your life. Take time to **process your emotions**, and **reconnect** with yourself and other people in your life.