



Dementia Australia

Grief, Loss & Guilt

A person with dementia, and their loved ones, will experience many emotions and feelings during the course of the disease.

Grief and Loss

Dementia embodies loss. The loss of what was, what might have been, of hopes, of dreams, of companionship, of independence and loss of mind. With loss comes grief and bereavement.

Dementia is an emotional roller coaster. No sooner do you begin to adjust and come to terms with one phase when further changes occur and feelings of grief are felt afresh.

Guilt

Guilt is a frequent companion when caring for a relative with dementia. Carers often feel guilty about seeking outside help, sending their loved one to respite or taking a holiday. You may feel guilty about thinking about residential care or deciding to place your relative into a nursing home. Guilt is a crippling emotion that only serves to increase your stress.

When guilt strikes, it is important to remind yourself of the following:

- You are human. You too have needs and these must be met if you are to continue to care to the best of your ability. Total selflessness doesn't do you, or the person for whom you are caring, any good.
- There are limitations to how much one person can do. Recognising those limitations

and seeking assistance is not a weakness, but a strength.

- Feeling guilty isn't going to change the situation.
- PRAISE yourself. You have shown the strength and courage to accept the most difficult challenge there is: caring.

Bereavement

When the time comes, the grief associated with the death of a parent, partner or loved one reignites the emotional roller coaster.

How people cope with grief and bereavement varies from one person to another however, a common initial reaction is shock, even if the death was expected. You may feel numb, and it is best to avoid making important decisions at this time. Re-experiencing feelings of anger and guilt are also common, as are feelings of depression.

Increasing the feeling of guilt, is often a sense of relief. The carer should not feel guilty about the relief they may feel when a loved one passes. It is OK to feel relieved that the experience of dementia, often referred to as the 'living death', is finally over.

It is important to remember that these are all normal feelings in the circumstances. They are your physical, mental and emotional reactions to extreme trauma. Allow yourself some time to get back into emotional health.