



Family Caregivers of British Columbia

Acknowledging the Losses Associated with Being a Caregiver

Family caregiving brings with it many changes for everyone involved. Among these is the loss of each person's expectations for how their future will be. Although we expect to grieve when someone dies or is diagnosed with a terminal illness, many people don't anticipate the many losses we can experience throughout the time we care for someone while adjusting to changes in their health.

Depending on the specifics of your family member's health or disability, you may be struggling with one or more of the following losses:

- **Independence** – Your day is now planned around someone else's needs and schedule.
- **Privacy** – Various healthcare workers may be coming into your home to help with the care. You may now need to involve others in making financial and other personal decisions.
- **Your hopes and dreams for the future** – Were you planning to travel after retirement? Will your parents be moving in with you so you can care for them?
- **Financial security** – Will your savings be going toward paying for care? Do you have to retire early?
- **Your relationship with the care receiver.** Do the roles feel like they are reversed now? Do you feel like you are now your spouse's caregiver and no longer their spouse?
- **Your social life, hobbies, leisure time** – No time to see your friends anymore? Too tired for that weekly bridge or golf game?
- **Your job** – Will you need to retire early, turn down a promotion or simply quit your job so you can provide care?

Your grief in response to these losses can appear in many ways including guilt, anxiety, helplessness, irritability or frustration. It is important that you express these emotions as they occur rather than allowing them to build up.

Some suggestions for coping with caregiving related loss include:

- Recognizing and talking about your feelings. Good friends, family members, or local religious organizations can be sources of support.
- Joining a support group. Support groups provide caregivers with the opportunity to share with other caregivers and learn from one another. The Family Caregivers' Network and other disease-specific agencies, such as the Alzheimer's Resource Center, provide

support groups for family caregivers. Visit www.familycaregiversnetwork.org for information.

- Honouring your memories of what used to be, while you acknowledge how things are now and what is still possible. Your life is not going to be the same, but it does not mean that you can't still enjoy it. Resistance is a lot more draining than acceptance.
- Creating new dreams, new connections, and new travel plans for the future based on your life as it is now.
- Writing down your thoughts and feelings. For individuals who enjoy writing, it can be a wonderful way to process the losses you are experiencing.
- Reading a book on coping with grief and loss and chronic illness.
- Doing activities you specifically enjoy. You may want to garden, read, go for a walk or sit on the beach.
- Asking for help when needed to meet the ongoing demands of caregiving.

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