



# Feelings

## Grief and Bereavement

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.

For the carer, when the time comes, the grief associated with the death of a parent, partner or relative to dementia starts the whole roller coaster ride again.

How people cope with grief and bereavement varies from one person to another.

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. Feelings of anger and guilt are also common, as is depression.

A feeling of relief is nothing to be guilty about. It is OK to feel relieved that the experience of dementia, often referred to as the 'living death', is finally over.

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.

## Especially for carers, a note on GUILT...

Guilt is a frequent companion when caring for a relative with dementia. You may feel guilty about putting your relative into a nursing home after promising never to even think about it. Or you feel guilty about feeling relief when the caring comes to an end; or if you get short tempered and yell at the person with dementia; or for seeking respite; or some other reason.

Guilt is a crippling emotion that only serves to increase your stress.

It may help to recognise and remind yourself of the following:

- \* You have needs as well. Unless they are met, you cannot continue to care to the best of your ability.
- \* You are human. You too have needs which must be met if you are to continue to care to the best of your ability. Total selflessness doesn't do either 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.

Help and assistance is available. You do not need to cope alone. **Please contact the Dementia Help Line on 1800 639 331.**