



The
**Dementia
Society**
Ottawa and Renfrew County

GRIEF AND DEMENTIA



Grief is a process experienced by everyone at some point and is a common feeling for caregivers. You are not alone. Below is information to help understand this experience:

What is grief?

Grief is a natural but often a difficult healing process. It is a series of emotional phases that happen when you lose something or someone of value or meaning. Some examples of loss resulting in grief are:

- Divorce and/or separation
- Loss of a job or a driver's license
- A new health diagnosis
- The passing of a loved one or pet
- The loss of a support system
- Ending of a caregiver role
- Financial changes

Is all loss experienced the same?

While caring for someone with dementia, grief can take many forms. Below are three common grief and loss experiences:

Anticipatory grief

Future loss and the death of the person are often anticipated by caregivers. This may be a way of emotionally and mentally preparing for the future and saying goodbye. Often, caregivers will feel guilt or shame for experiencing anticipatory grief. It is important to remember that this is a normal experience.

Ambiguous loss

Caregivers sometimes feel grief because they are losing parts of a person. Changes in communication, relationships, or the person's personality, can create a sense of loss. This can be confusing because the person is still living but is not the same as before the dementia.

End of life grief

As dementia progresses, caregivers often take on additional care and household needs. After the person passes away, you may not only miss the person, but also lose a caregiving routine and identity. This can feel like a loss of purpose. Some caregivers also feel relieved during this time because their loved one is no longer suffering.

To learn more about dementia related grief, visit: <https://www.dementia.org/dementia-grief-characteristics>.

How do I recognize signs of grief?

You may experience:

- Increased heartbeat and/or hot flashes
- Poor sleep quality and/or concentration
- Lack of interest in your usual activities
- Loss or increase of appetite

You may feel:

- Overwhelmed and/or lost
- Depression, sadness
- Shocked, confused, and/or numb
- Angry and/or frustrated
- Isolated
- Regretful and/or resentful

Labelling the emotion as it comes up can be a powerful tool for healing. Grief is unique to every person experiencing it. Individuals may cycle through grief or experience "waves" of emotion.

How do I cope with feelings of grief?

Here are some ways to look after yourself while grieving:

- Find individual, couples and/or family counselling
- Connect with others who are also experiencing grief
- Engage in self-care like exercise or rest
- Engage in employee assistance programs
- Explore the meaning of life and death
- Let yourself feel and accept emotions that come up
- Journal your process and/or pursue a creative outlet
- Use personal strategies that were helpful for you in the past

The grieving process takes time. Check-in daily with yourself to keep track of how you are feeling. This can help you to identify the need to reach for community resources and supports when you need them.

What community resources are available?

- Ottawa Distress Centre: <https://www.dcottawa.on.ca/>
- The Dementia Society Grief Peer Support Group: <https://www.eventbrite.ca/e/grief-peer-support-group-tickets-110988774412>
- Bereaved Families of Ontario – Education: <https://www.bfo-ottawa.org/our-programs/>
- Family Services Ottawa Programs: <https://familyservicesottawa.org/category/events/>
- Wabano Walk-in Counselling Centre: <https://wabano.com/mental-wellness/walk-in-crisis-counsellor/>
- Walk-in Counselling Clinics: <https://walkincounselling.com/>
- Registered Psychotherapists: <https://www.crpo.ca/find-a-registered-psychotherapist/>
- Registered Psychologists: <https://ottawa-psychologists.org/>
- Certified Canadian Counsellors: <https://www.ccpa-accp.ca/find-a-canadian-certified-counsellor/>

What are some recommended readings on grief?

- Canadian Virtual Hospice. My grief. <http://www.mygrief.ca/>
- Canadian Mental Health Association. Grieving. <https://cmha.ca/documents/grieving>
- A Caregiver's Guide: A handbook about end-of-life care (2014). The Order of St. Lazarus in Canada and the Canadian Hospice Care Association.
- James, J.W. and Friedman, R. (2009), The Grief Recovery Handbook. The action program for moving beyond death, divorce, and other losses. Harper Collins.

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