

Caring for Yourself as you Care for Someone Else: *Change, Loss, and Caregiving*

Providing care for a friend or family member can be very exhausting at times. There are physical needs along with the emotions you feel as you adjust to changes in your friend or family member's life. With each change, you may experience feelings of loss. Coping with these feelings while you provide care for your friend or family member can be a challenge. Here are some of the feelings you may experience:

Reactions to Change and Loss :

- Guilt
- Sadness
- Anxiety
- Withdrawal
- Irritability
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Anger/frustration
- Feeling helpless
- Change in appetite

Steps for Coping with Change and Loss :

Talk about your feelings.

Good friends, religious or spiritual care providers, and family members can be good sources of support. Reach out to others – this will help reduce feelings of isolation.

Join a support group.

Support groups can provide caregivers with the opportunity to share with other caregivers and learn from one another. Those who feel isolated by their caregiving responsibilities, can join a group by telephone or on the Internet. Local organizations often provide support groups you can attend in person.

Write your feelings down.

Writing or journaling is not for everyone. For individuals who enjoy writing, it can be a wonderful way to express feelings of loss and grief. It doesn't matter what you write or how you spell – the process of putting your feelings down on paper is what's most important.

Read a book on coping with grief.

There are several books available on the issues of caregiving, self-help, grieving, and loss. Your local library can help you locate these books. Also ask other caregivers what resources they have found to be helpful.

You, as a caregiver, may experience physical, emotional, and spiritual pain. You may need or want help with this pain and with meeting the demands of caregiving.

- If available, ask family and friend to provide some of the assistance you may need at this time.
- Help can also be hired privately.
- Community organizations are a great resource for various types of help. Local religious organizations and organizations such as your local Cancer, Lung, or Alzheimer's Association can help in many ways.

Make time for you.

Do what works for you. For some individuals that may mean spending time with friends, family members, or a group. Others may need time alone. There are still others who need to spend time doing something like gardening, planting a tree, or going for a walk. Do whatever it takes to express *your* feelings so you can continue doing the things that are important to you.