Help family caregivers find creative ways to engage with the person with dementia, despite their grief. Every person, regardless of their abilities, maintains a core of self that can be reached.

Help caregivers understand how the ambiguous loss and grief they may experience in caring for a person with dementia is different than the loss and grief of death.

Name, normalize and validate their grief, which is often not acknowledged or supported.

Educate and engage family caregivers in effective ways of managing loss and grief through discussion, with resource materials, workshops and referrals to support services.

Support caregivers by gently probing and inviting them to talk about loss and grief issues once a rapport has been established.

Look for opportunities in peer support groups to introduce and explore loss and grief experiences as a difficult, but critical issue for caregivers.

Set up a dedicated peer support group with a local Alzheimer Society office to help family caregivers live with ambiguous loss and grief.

Ask caregivers to identify the people in their life who are there for them in good times and bad, and encourage them to reach out to their circle of family or friends for support.

Encourage caregivers to ease the double load of caregiving and grieving by attending to both, getting breaks from care and taking time for grieving.

Offer suggestions to help caregivers to look after their own needs and wellness by staying physically active, eating well, relieving stress, drawing on their spirituality, and taking breaks from care.

Be aware of different grieving styles, such as intuitive and instrumental, and help caregivers see that each family member may have their own grieving style.

Be sensitive to a wide range of caregiver grief reactions, including sadness, anger, anxiety, ambivalence, guilt, denial and helplessness.

Help caregivers understand that certain events and stages, such as moving a person with dementia to a long-term care home or not being able to recognize family members, often trigger more intense grief.

Acknowledge and affirm caregivers’ strengths, success and resilience in coping with losses and adapting to changes.

Encourage caregivers to think about preparing and planning a life in the future, by nurturing meaningful relationships and making new connections.

For more information, contact your local Alzheimer Society or visit our website at www.alzheimer.ca