

Ambiguous Loss and Grief

What you can do to help family caregivers cope: tips and strategies

Alzheimer *Society*

- Help family caregivers find creative ways to engage** with the person with dementia, despite their grief. Every person, regardless of her 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.
- Encourage caregivers to stay connected** to family and friends, and be open to building new relationships with others who can be supportive.
- 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** to help family caregivers live with ambiguous loss and grief in a local Alzheimer Society chapter.
- 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.
- Encourage caregivers to connect** with the person with dementia as he or she is today. Staying connected can ease distress for both the caregiver and the person with dementia.
- Be aware of different grieving styles**, such as intuitive and instrumental, and help caregivers see that each family member may have his or her 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 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.