



Your Company

Family Caregiver Resources

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Once your loved one has died

Waves of emotions



When a person you've been caring for dies, you are likely to have many feelings.

Sometimes conflicting feelings.

You may find that emotions wash over you unexpectedly, arising suddenly like a wave, and then subsiding. This is a normal part of mourning.

There is no right or wrong way to grieve. And there is no timetable.

People come to a new sense of emotional balance in their own time. Don't be surprised if you feel many emotions as you process the loss of your loved one.

- **Grief** can be described as a combination of sadness and love. Expect your sadness to retreat over time and on no specific schedule. The memories of love will remain.
- **Relief** is another common emotion. Relief that your loved one is no longer struggling. But also relief that you no longer need to focus so intensely on their care. It's not disloyal of you. It's very human to feel a sense of release, even gratitude, that this chapter is over.
- **Guilt** may also arise. None of us is selfless, kind, and loving at all times. We do the best we can. As you reminisce, forgive yourself for any lapses. Instead, acknowledge all that you were able to contribute.

Other reactions to loss

You may find it difficult to concentrate. Some people describe a fuzziness in their thinking. You may experience physical pains and sleep disturbances. While there are those who wake up in the middle of the night and have trouble sleeping, others find they sleep too much.

The tender first year

There will be many "firsts" in your initial year after caregiving: First holidays, first birthdays. And if your loved one was a spouse, the first anniversary without them.

As you cross these milestones, be prepared for a strong welling up of emotions. Expect this vulnerability—it is normal—and be gentle with yourself.

Overwhelm

If you find that it's hard to get up in the morning and go through the day for a period of two weeks or more, talk to your doctor. Although depression might seem "normal" for the circumstances, it does not have to go untreated. It may be that a support group, talking with a therapist, or medication can help you through this rough leg of your journey.



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Elder Pages Online supports older adults in [Your Service Area] as they plan for their later years.

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What to do after a death



The following are tasks to address in the first week or two. You will likely be dealing with funeral arrangements and a range of emotions. See if you can get help with these.

Get the word out. Ask one or two family members or friends to contact others. Use your relative's calendar and address book for names. Don't forget the dentist, beauty shop, and other service providers. Contact groups your relative belonged to (bingo, exercise, community service, etc.). Consider placing an obituary in the local newspaper.

Care for the home. If the house is unoccupied, arrange for pet and plant care or adoption. Remove any perishables in the kitchen. Cancel meal delivery, newspaper, and home care services. But don't stop utilities. You want the house to look lived in for security reasons. Put a light or two on a timer and tell the neighbors. Have mail forwarded.

Order death certificates. Original death certificates are required when notifying Social Security, the VA, life insurance or the bank. Order ten from the mortuary or county health department. They are pricey and take a week or so to arrive. Some companies will accept a photocopy or will return a certificate after use.

Take care of money matters. Notify your relative's attorney or the executor of the trust. If your loved one had assets but did not prepare a will or trust, contact an estate attorney. You will need guidance about handling banking and other financial issues.

Contact **Social Security**. Ask if the current month's benefit should be returned. Get information about survivor benefits for a remaining spouse or child. Do the same with the Veterans Administration.

Notify the source of any retirement pension or annuity. Cancel health insurance and any credit cards. Review incoming bills. Talk to the bank. Cancel any automated payments other than utilities. File for any life insurance benefits.

Eventual reentry

If caring for your loved one was the main focus of your days, after their passing, expect a feeling of emptiness. In caregiving, you may have given up many personal activities, friendships, and possibly even a career, to accommodate your relative's needs. This is especially true if they lived with you or had Parkinson's or Alzheimer's or some other long-term condition.

Take care of your health

Get a physical! Like many family caregivers, you probably ignored your own health needs—symptoms, doctor visits—because your loved one's seemed more pressing. This pattern is so common that many caregivers suddenly come down with something serious post-caregiving! Also take care by eating well, exercising, and getting sleep.

Who am I?

Because your focus was on your ailing loved one, you may have a sense of having forgotten who *you* are. This is especially true if the person who died was your spouse. Be curious: What appeals to you? Rediscover your personal balance and preferences.

Reengage slowly

Start with the inner circle of your family. You may have fences to mend if those relationships were put on hold. Reach out to siblings, your spouse, your children to rebuild your connection. Then begin to engage with friends, optimally those who have experience with loss. If you were working, returning to the normalcy of your career may feel comforting.

Avoid big decisions

Grief counselors recommend NOT making big moves or lifestyle changes for the first year. Volunteering may be a great way to reconnect with the world and regain a sense of life purpose. You might draw upon your caregiving skills—give yourself a year before doing that—or do something entirely different. Keep commitments light. Take time to realize the desires and the bandwidth of the "new" same-but-deeper you.

Contact us at **707.477.0700**



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