



The Community Hospice Grief Center

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When a Loved One Is Dying

Caring for someone who is terminally ill may sometimes feel like a roller-coaster ride with a broken off-switch. Nothing stays the same for long. And just when you think you've gotten things figured out, something happens to disrupt the calm you've just achieved. This last stage of life may last days, months or years. *It is important to get the support you need.*

Both the ill person and their caregivers may grieve for the way life was and for the loss of their dreams for the future. Caregivers frequently experience many losses and at the same time, take on additional unfamiliar roles. *Let go of unnecessary obligations and get help with new responsibilities when you can.*

Sometimes, the inability of friends and family members to manage their own discomfort with serious illness may cause the dying person and caregivers to feel hurt and isolated. Help may come from unexpected people. *Share your thoughts and feelings with the ones that can really hear.*

As the disease progresses, people react to each change. This can then be followed by a period of calm as everyone adjusts to the new circumstances. *It is important to remember that these waves of stress followed by calm are a normal part of the adjustment process and are always in flux.*

During these times, all are faced with adapting to new roles while staying emotionally close and at the same time preparing for the final separation. These challenges can produce strong and conflicting reactions. Fear and anger about what is happening can cause loved ones to lash out and say and do things that add to the pain. *Be patient with yourself and tolerant of others.*

This can also be a time when friends and family rally together to share the load of responsibility. Talking about new concerns as they come up makes it easier to ensure that various needs are met as well as possible. *When this happens, people sometimes experience a new closeness or peace in their relationships.*

Since no one is perfect, there is usually a combination of both frustration and support. Forgive or apologize when you need to and move on. It doesn't help to hold on to angry or guilty feelings, use your energy to love and help. You will feel better in the long run.

Day to day coping skills that really make a difference in how you feel include basic self-care (eating, sleeping, exercising), talking to supportive friends, getting important medical information and engaging in activities that nurture the soul.

Goals to keep in mind that will help the overall process include:

- Find a balance between self-care with caring for your loved ones.
- Stay connected by talking, touching and sharing your favorite memories.
- Take time to think ahead and plan as much as possible.
- Talk as much as you can about the things you have shared and how you feel about them.