

Grief Notes

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What Do I Do When Caregiving Ends? by George McLaughlin, Bereavement Coordinator

The death of a loved one creates many changes for family members, friends, and especially caregivers. For weeks, months or even years life has been focused on meeting the everyday needs of your loved one. Life is suddenly different as the focus has now forever changed. Getting used to new life situations, ranging from everyday routines to future plans, will take some time.

Areas of Anticipated Change

Plans and Priorities: There may be significant changes that reflect what matters most to you now. A previous priority, such as work, may be replaced by a new priority, such as spending more time with family and friends or personal health and well-being. As you adjust to a new lifestyle, it may become necessary to change priorities for practical reasons, to alter goals or delay taking steps to achieve them.

Relationships: Following the death of a loved one, some friends or family members may struggle with what to say or how to interact with you. Some may distance themselves while others are drawn even closer than before. Refocusing your life may result in a different connection with others. New relationships and friendships may also develop as time goes by.

Routines: While caring for a loved one who has been sick, much of your daily routine has likely involved hospital visits and other caregiving tasks. With their death this routine ends, leaving you with a deep sense of loss and missing your caregiving responsibilities. Over time, you will be able to develop a new routine that begins to feel comfortable and may involve taking on some tasks he or she used to handle.

Finances: The death of a family member often impacts a family's finances and brings additional strain to an already difficult situation. There may now be fewer paychecks, a decrease in social security benefits, or payments from a life insurance policy along with increased expenses. If your loved one was a main wage earner, it may be necessary for you to work again or begin work for the first time to help meet the current needs.

Interests: You may no longer be interested in some activities you previously enjoyed or you may develop new interests. These could include becoming involved in activities that were important to your loved one or volunteering at a local hospital or for your local hospice program.

Faith and Spirituality: Following the death of someone you love, you may contemplate your religious or spiritual beliefs or your understanding of the meaning of life. On the other hand, you may find that your faith becomes stronger and an unequalled source of comfort.

Action Steps to Consider

- Try to remain positive as you embrace new responsibilities and opportunities.
- Take time when making major decisions.
- Don't be afraid to seek advice and assistance.
- Consider keeping a journal to stay focused as you work through these changes.
- Consider joining a support group so you don't feel alone in your experiences.

In conclusion, change is normal and part of your journey toward healing and wholeness. Please do not hesitate to reach out to those at Hospice for guidance and support.