

Coping with Grief as a Caregiver

Recognizing loss, navigating change, and caring for yourself along the way

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COMMUNITY IS STRONGER THAN CANCER

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"There are only four kinds of people in the world: *those who have been caregivers, those who are currently caregivers, those who will be caregivers, and those who will need caregivers.*"

Rosalynn Carter



Grief Is About Loss, Not Only Death

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Caregivers may grieve:

- Changes in a loved one's health or abilities
- Changes in the relationship
- Loss of independence—theirs or yours
- Changes in roles and responsibilities
- Work, hobbies, friendships or routines
- Plans for the future
- A sense of predictability or control
- The life you thought you would have

If it feels like a loss to you, it can create grief



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The Many Losses Hidden Inside Cargiving

Anticipatory Grief

Grieving What May Be Ahead

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Anticipatory grief *happens when we anticipate or prepare for a future loss.*

- Further changes in someone's health or abilities
- Loss of independence
- A changing relationship
- Increasing caregiving responsibilities
- Moving a loved one from their home
- Future plans that may not happen
- Eventually losing the person you love

Hope and grief can exist at the same time.

Grief Isn’t a Straight Line

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Anger

Fear

Loneliness

Sadness

Guilt

Relief

You may feel several of these at the same time.

Gratitude

Hope

Joy

Resentment

Numbness

There is no “right” way or timeline for grief.

Grief Can Show Up Everywhere

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Sometimes what feels like "I'm not handling this well" is grief.

EMOTIONAL

- Sadness
- Anxiety
- Anger
- Guilt
- Irritability

COGNITIVE

- Forgetfulness
- Trouble concentrating
- Mental fog
- Indecision

PHYSICAL

- Fatigue
- Sleep changes
- Appetite Changes
- Tension

BEHAVIORAL/ SPIRITUAL

- Withdrawal
- Loss of interest
- Questioning meaning
- Changes in beliefs

When Caregiving Changes the Relationship

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You may still be their…

spouse • partner • child • parent • sibling • friend

But now you're also…

scheduler • driver • advocate • medication manager • decision-maker • personal care assistant • problem-solver



Sometimes the caregiving role becomes so big that the original relationship feels harder to find.

What Helps Us Cope with Grief?

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NAME IT

FEEL IT

SHARE IT

ADJUST

RESTORE

Coping isn't making grief disappear.

It's finding ways to carry it.

Make Room for You, Too

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Caregiving is one part of who you are.

Ask yourself:

- What have I stopped doing that matters to me?
- Who haven't I connected with lately?
- What does my body need?
- Where could I use help?
- What is one small thing that still feels like me?

You don't have to earn rest, joy, or a break.

You Weren’t Meant to Do This Alone

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Be specific when asking for help.

Instead of:
“I need help.”

Try:

“Could you bring dinner Thursday?”
“Can you stay with Mom for two hours?”
“Can you make these three phone calls?”
“Could you drive him to this appointment?”
“Can I call you and just vent—not problem-solve?”

Support can also come from:

- Friends & family
- Support groups
- Faith/community
- Respite services
- Social workers
- Therapists
- Healthcare teams
- Caregiver organizations

When Grief Feels Too Heavy to Carry Alone

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Consider Additional Support When:

- Struggling to **function day to day**
- Emotions feel **increasingly intense**
- Sleep/appetite/ concentration **are affected**
- Feel stuck or **unable to move forward**
- **"I can't keep doing this by myself."**
- Relying on **alcohol or substances to cope**
- Withdrawing **from everyone**
- Anxiety, depression, guilt, or hoplessness **feel overwhelming**

A 60-Second Reflection

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Think of one thing caregiving has changed for you.

What do you miss?

Think of one thing you need right now.

More help? Rest? Connection? Information? Time? Permission to feel?

What is one small step you could take this week?

Make a plan.

What I Hope You Remember

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Your grief matters, too.

You can love someone **and** feel frustrated.
You can feel hopeful **and** afraid.
You can be grateful **and** exhausted.
You can experience joy **while** grieving.
You can care for someone **without disappearing yourself**.

You don't have to carry caregiving—or grief—alone.

Resources - Kansas City

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Gilda's Club Kansas City
Free support groups, counseling, education and healthy lifestyle programs for people impacted by cancer, including caregivers and families.

gildasclubkc.org · 816-531-5444

Turning Point – The University of Kansas Health System
Free programs supporting emotional wellness, resilience and coping for individuals and families affected by serious or chronic illness.

Turning Point · 913-574-0900

Sandwiched KC
Free caregiver support groups, education, one-on-one guidance and a directory of Kansas City-area resources.

sandwichedkc.com · 816-472-9178

Resources - National

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Family Caregiver Alliance
Caregiving education, emotional support resources, practical guides and self-care strategies.

caregiver.org · 800-445-8106

Caregiver Action Network
Free caregiver education, peer support, practical tools and personalized guidance through its Caregiver Help Desk.

caregiveraction.org · 855-227-3640

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Q & A