

Coping with Loss

Written by Cheri Burcham and Ann Marie Marshall, University of Illinois Extension Educators, Family Life

Caregivers may experience many types of loss, including loss of:

- Relationships and social or recreational interaction with friends, spouse, coworkers, and children. As these relationships change or are lost, caregivers may experience feelings of isolation.
- Roles, identity, and sometimes occupation as the role of caregiver continues
- Control over personal time, freedom, privacy, future plans, and life events
- Well-being, including emotions, such as worry and guilt feelings, concentration, and health issues, such as lack of sleep
- Diminished physical capacity and death of the care-receiver

Identifying these losses is the first step toward understanding these feelings. There are also losses that are not easily identified. Although the care-receiver may be physically present, he may be mentally or emotionally absent. He may not be quite the same person that he used to be. These ambiguous losses can trigger complicated reactions with no rituals to guide you through the grief.

Ways to Cope with Your Losses

- Talk and express your feelings regarding your problems with caregiving. Friends, relatives, counselors, ministers, or support group members can be great listeners.
- Schedule time for yourself and maintain your social contacts. Avoid isolating yourself from others. Do not feel guilty for having someone give you a break from your caregiving duties.
- Be realistic about your abilities and limitations as a caregiver. You can't do it alone, so be willing to accept help from others.
- Realize you are not alone with your feelings. Many people, including other caregivers, share your concerns and thoughts.
- Keep your sense of humor. Remember that laughter can be the best medicine.
- Forgive yourself and those around you.