



CAREGIVER ASSISTANCE NEWS

“CARING FOR YOU ... CARING FOR OTHERS”

Loss, Grief and Depression

The Emotions of Long-Term Illness

No one feels joy when diagnosed with a long-term illness. About the best emotion may be relief that there's finally an explanation for symptoms. More typically, people feel anger, denial and depression at learning of such a diagnosis. Heart patients may bemoan their restricted activity level; stroke survivors may feel depressed over the loss of speech or the use of a limb; Alzheimer's patients may fear what the future holds.

A Common Response

Depression is a common response to any loss of ability or independence. It may range from feeling down for a few hours to severe clinical depression that may last for months.

Depression does *not* mean a person has a weak character, and it should not be considered shameful. It is *not* something the person in your care can control or prevent through sheer willpower. It is a serious affliction that not only compromises a person's quality of life, but jeopardizes recovery. For example, typically rehab therapists will not work with a person diagnosed with depression until it is treated because they have learned that depressed people don't make progress in rehab.

Symptoms of Depression

You or the person in your care may feel---

- long-lasting sad, anxious or "empty" mood
- feelings of hopelessness, pessimism
- feelings of guilt, worthlessness, helplessness
- loss of interest or pleasure in hobbies and activities that were once enjoyed, including sex
- decreased energy, always feeling tired, being "slowed down"
- difficulty concentrating, remembering, making decisions
- insomnia, early-morning awakening or oversleeping
- appetite and/or weight changes
- thoughts of death or suicide, or suicidal attempts
- restlessness, irritability



If five or more of these symptoms last for longer than two weeks, depression may be the cause.

The good news is that depression is treatable. Talk to your physician or psychiatrist about treatment options. Anti-depressants can be prescribed by the primary care physician. The most effective treatment combines medication with talking therapy.

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Music Can Help

Music is often soothing and people can sing or just listen to old songs and hymns. Singing along with them can calm someone as well as be entertaining.

Hymn music can be especially comforting. Singing, playing instruments, and moving or dancing to music can improve communication, motor skills--and perhaps most importantly--mood. What was the favorite music of the person in your care? Which songs were comforting? Ask her or him if she/he would like to listen to music and play it softly. Find music that lifts the spirits and play it for everyone's benefit.



The Ombudsman program can handle your concerns about areas such as elder abuse, client care, consumer rights, etc. For more information, call 1-800-582-7277.

For information about Ohio Medicaid programs or to report suspected Medicaid fraud, you may call the Ohio Medicaid Fraud Hotline at 1-800-324-8680.

The Importance of Grief

Grieving is an essential step in recovering from losses. Grief is not an illness; it can't be cured, but caregivers can help the person in their care grieve their losses.

Allow the person in your care to feel their feelings: Everyone grieves differently: some cry, some withdraw, some express anger.

Learn to listen: Talking and processing feelings out loud can help the patient understand what has happened. The grieving person's agenda should drive the conversation. Listen without judgment.

Forge a spiritual connection: Religious faith can be a powerful resource, and prayers can lessen the intensity of sadness. Your place of worship may have a grief or illness mission.

Understand there's no right way to grieve: Some people grieve and cry on the outside; others on the inside. Whether someone cries or not doesn't determine their level of grief. Many people prefer to grieve in private.

Do something active: Being physically active changes a person's mood. Getting outside prevents the person from feeling limited.



Tip

It is helpful to deal with grief by being around people who have gone through the same experience. Most communities have grief support groups. Check with your place of worship and other nonprofit organizations.

Let go with a ritual: When the person is ready, perform a ritual of some sort, such as meditation, lighting a candle or planting a tree, taking a ritual bath or playing meaningful music.



Plan for the future: As feelings of loss lessen, think about what is to come. Both caregiver and patient need to look to the future and redefine who they are and how they will relate. What can the patient do for herself? What can you do to make that easier and more fulfilling?

For caregivers, deal with your own emotions: Your life has been changed, and you may feel guilt, fear, shame or anger. Allow yourself to feel those feelings, then forgive yourself.

Source: *Helping Grieving People: When Tears Are Not Enough* by psychologist J. Shep Jeffreys

It's only when we truly know and understand that we have a limited time on earth--and that we have no way of knowing when our time is up--that we will begin to live each day to the fullest, as if it was the only one we had.
~Elisabeth Kubler-Ross

Taking Care of Yourself--Laughter is Good Medicine

In his book *Anatomy of Illness*, author and medical school professor Norman Cousins claims that laughter is good medicine. He used laughter to cure himself of a serious and painful collagen disease that had defied medical treatment. He found that 10 minutes of genuine belly laughter would give him at least two hours of pain-free sleep. He describes laughter as "inner jogging," because it gives every system in the body a workout. Our cardiovascular and respiratory systems benefit more from 20 seconds of laughter than three minutes on a rowing machine. Muscles relax and hormones that make you feel good (endorphins) are released into the bloodstream. Laughter also activates the immune system. So, if you want to feel better immediately, find a way to tickle your funny bone.



LIVE LIFE LAUGHING

The procedure only took a few minutes, but he enjoys spending hours describing it.



Inspiration

Your worst enemy cannot harm you as much as your own mind, unguarded. But once mastered, no one can help you as much.
~Buddha

Resource for You

Mental Health America

The country's oldest and largest nonprofit organization addressing mental health and illness. It offers a variety of materials and local referrals for treatment and support on its website www.nmha.org or by calling 800-969-6642.