



UNDERSTANDING HOW CARING FOR A LOVED ONE AFFECTS YOU

Grieving and Emotional Recovery

Why is it Important to Know About Grieving?

After a stroke, people lose parts of their previous life. They may lose their job, hobbies, or skills. People strongly attach their self-worth to these activities. Stroke survivors go through a grieving process.

As a family member of *a person with stroke*, you may go through a similar process. It may be difficult to adjust to your new role as a caregiver. You may mourn the loss of things you had before. Remember that these feelings are normal and are important for growth. Allowing yourself and your loved one to grieve is healthy.

“I must be willing to give up what I am in order to become what I will be.” – Albert Einstein

What is Grieving?

Grieving is a process with stages. People may go through all stages or none. People grieve in different ways. Below are examples of thoughts people have in each stage:

Denial

The first reaction after loss may be shock. You or your loved one may deny the loss has occurred. Denial allows the mind to protect us from the pain and loss.

Examples of Denial: “This can’t be happening to me.” “I’m fine, everything will be back to normal soon.”

Anger

Anger is typically the second emotion after a major loss. The person is not ready to process the loss.

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<http://www.cidrr8.research.va.gov/rescue/>

Examples of Anger: “It’s not fair!” “Who is to blame for this?”

Bargaining

Bargaining is often the third stage. Persons in this stage often have thoughts of regret. There is a desire to “make a deal” with a higher power to return back to normal.

Examples of Bargaining: “Please just make this go away, I will do anything.”

Depression

Most people have a period of depression, even if they do not go through the other stages of grief. Depression involves feelings of sadness, guilt, or hopelessness.

Examples of Depression: “What is the point?” “I will never be happy again.”

Acceptance

Acceptance is the final stage. The mind has processed the initial pain from the loss. A person will likely still feel sad or may have anger. But, the mind is able to accept the loss. The mind will look to the future with hope of a “new normal”.

Examples of Acceptance: “I am ready to find a new me.” “I will be OK with things the way they are.”

Ways to Help Your Loved One Grieve

- Be patient. Remember that your loved one has suffered a big loss.
- Give your loved one support. Respect your loved one’s need for space.
- Give your loved one tasks that he or she is able to do. Praise your loved one.
- Encourage your loved one to express feelings when ready. Let your loved one know that his or her feelings are okay.
- Suggest your loved one attend a support group for stroke survivors.

Ways to Help Yourself Grieve

- Allow yourself time to grieve. Do not blame yourself for feelings that come up.
- Plan time each day to take care of yourself. Go for a walk or a movie. Do activities that are fun and relaxing.
- Write in a journal about your thoughts and feelings. Make notes about things you are proud and thankful for. Write about things you are looking forward to in the future.

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- Try to keep your previous friendships and hobbies. Get help from others so you have time for yourself.
- Join a caregiver support group. Talking to other caregivers who have similar experiences is often helpful.

When to Get Help

People spend different amounts of time in each stage of grief. If you or your loved one has been in any stage of grief for longer than one month, talk with a healthcare provider.

Red Flag: Grieving Warning Signs

If you or your loved one experience any of the following:

- Thoughts of hurting yourself or someone else
- Attempts to harm yourself or someone else
- So depressed that you or your loved one refuse food or personal care



Call 9-1-1 or your healthcare provider. This is a serious problem.

Remember

- Everyone grieves in different ways. You or your loved one may experience all, none, or one of the stages of grief.
- There are ways to help your loved one and yourself through the grieving process. You can get a referral for counseling. Medications may help with recovery.
- Talk with a healthcare provider when feelings of denial, anger, bargaining, or depression last longer than a few months.

More Resources

The following resources are related to this fact sheet only. [View a full list of the resources from all RESCUE fact sheets.](#)

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American Psychological Association

Web: <http://www.apa.org/index.aspx>

The American Psychological Association has information on grieving as well as psychological disorders.



Hospice: A Guide to Grief

Web: www.hospicenet.org/html/grief_guide.html

Hospice provides expert information on grieving and loss from death and chronic illness.



My HealthVet

Web: www.myhealth.va.gov

My HealthVet (MHV) provides trusted information on stroke and other health conditions. It also provides resources for stroke caregivers and tools to track your loved one's health.



Visit the [My HealthVet Caregiver Assistance Center](#) for more information on caregiving.

Suicide Prevention Lifeline

Phone: 1-800-273-8255

If you or your loved one has any thoughts of hurting yourself or anyone else, please call immediately. This national hotline is here to connect you with help and support.



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VA Caregiver Support

Web: <http://www.caregiver.va.gov/>

Phone: 1-855-260-3274



The VA Caregiver Support line is there for you to call if you have questions about resources at the VA, or if you just need to talk. The VA Caregiver website offers information and resources for caregivers of veterans.

***Link Disclaimer:** Links to information and Web sites outside of the Department of Veterans Affairs do not indicate an endorsement of products or services offered by the sites. In addition, these sites may have privacy and security policies that are inconsistent with those of VA.

[Download a free version of Adobe Reader*](#) to view PDF files.

References: Depression Trumps Recovery. (2008). *American Stroke Association*. Retrieved November 25, 2013, from http://www.strokeassociation.org/STROKEEC-Trumps-Recovery_UCM_309731_Article.jsp; Ross, E., & Kessler, D. (2005). *On grief and grieving: finding the meaning of grief through the five stages of loss*. London: Simon & Schuster.



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