



It is common for both the memory impaired person and their caregiver to experience feelings of loss and grief when faced with the diagnosis and progression of dementia.

How grief and loss affects the caregiver:

Grief associated with a chronic illness like dementia may extend over many years. . .

How grief and loss affects the person with dementia:

The person who has dementia may be aware of a gradual loss of many aspects of self, and their connection to others and their way of life.

Some of the losses are:

- Companionship with the person
- Relationship to the person
- Enjoyment in shared activities
- Dreams for future plans – enjoying travel, grandchildren or hobbies
- Division of labor – “you manage the checkbook and I’ll do the cooking”

Some of the losses are:

- Gradual decline in memory
- Changes in thinking and language
- Personality changes
- Ability to perform simple tasks
- Independence and roles
- Driving privileges
- Relationships and activities
- Control over one’s own future

Caregiver Tips for handling grief:

- Maintain daily routines and schedule time to rest
- Find ways to relax–relaxation tapes, reading, prayer, or music
- Make time for physical exercise–take walks, use exercise tapes, join a wellness or fitness center
- Do not forget to laugh–try to find humor even in difficult situations
- Maintain friendships and connections to family
- Seek help from support groups, spiritual community, or professional counselors
- Use resources that will help you care for the person

Memory impaired person: Tips for handling grief:

- Stay involved in activities or enroll in an adult day care program
- Get plenty of physical exercise
- Join a support group for those who can participate in the early stages
- Seek psychological or spiritual counseling

Adapted from “Dementia: The Long Good-Bye” The Joseph and Kathleen Bryan Alzheimer’s Disease Research Center, Duke University Medical Center.