

# Support for carers after bereavement

Carers may experience feelings of grief and similar emotions related to bereavement.

Bereavement after being a carer can be a difficult and trying time. Carers experience many feelings and issues when the person they cared for dies.

Losing someone close to you can be devastating. The person who has been part of day-to-day life is no longer there. The loss can seem even greater if you have been caring for that person. How you cope with the death of the person you cared for is very personal.

After a death there are many practical things to do, like registering the death and arranging the funeral. Family and friends may be around more than usual. You may only start to grieve after the practicalities are dealt with and people around you get back to their everyday lives.

The following information may help you think about how grief is experienced by carers when the person they cared for dies.

## HOW GRIEF MIGHT AFFECT YOU

Everyone deals with grief in their own individual way. There is no right or wrong way to deal with grief but there are common thoughts and stages of grief. You may experience feelings of numbness, anger and despair combined with physical reactions such as insomnia and loss of appetite. These stages take time and you may feel all or none of these apply to you. It is important to listen to your own feelings. Do what's best for you rather than what others think is best.

Give yourself as much time as you need to grieve. There is no set pattern of emotions and behaviours that everyone follows. Grief does not always happen right away.

As well as coping with the loss of the person you cared for, you also have to deal with the loss of your caring role. You may feel guilty about feeling relief, but you may also feel exhausted or alone.

The death of the person you cared for may mean that the relationships you built up with the professionals involved in their care change or come to an end.

Carers also talk about losing contact with friends and family because of the demands of their caring role. But re-establishing old relationships or cultivating new ones may be the last thing you feel like doing when you have just lost someone.

## FINDING SUPPORT

You will feel different when you are with other people or at different times during the grief process. The best help and support can come from the people you know best, and who know you best.

You may find that some people seem awkward around you. People don't want to make a mistake and say or do the 'wrong thing'. If you can, tell the people around you what you need from them and how they can help. Family and friends may also be able to help you do this.

Talking about the person who died can help you to begin to accept their loss, and to cope with the feelings you have.

Friends and relatives who can share memories with you can be a great source of support. Talking to other people who have experienced grief, and who have a better understanding of what you are going through, can also help.

Although you may not feel like getting help dealing with your grief, your Parkinson's Community Educator, local hospice or GP can put you in touch with a bereavement counsellor or grief support network.

## WHAT NOW?

The strongest emotions will gradually reduce in intensity and frequency over time. It may take time to come to terms with the end of your caring role. Having more time to yourself may give you the opportunity for a rest, but it can also leave you with time to fill.

If you are used to always having things to do, it can be hard to stop and think about what you would like to do, and to be able to make choices for yourself.

Some people find that once they are no longer caring, exhaustion—both physical and emotional—catches up with them and they may feel unwell for a while.

After caring for someone else and putting their needs first, it is really important to look after yourself and let other people look after you through this time.

When caring ends, some practical matters will have to be dealt with fairly quickly, for example, benefits and housing, but you do not need to rush into making decisions about what you do next.

It can take some time to adjust to the loss of your caring role, but there will come a time when you are ready to think about what to do next.

[carers.net.nz](http://carers.net.nz) | [carersuk.org](http://carersuk.org)

## PARKINSON'S NEW ZEALAND AGM

The AGM of Parkinson's New Zealand will be held on **Saturday 9th April 2016 at 12pm.**

The AGM is preceded by the **annual workshops on Friday 8 April and Saturday morning.** Both of these meetings will be held at the St John's Conference Centre in Wellington.