



on being a carer

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A Carer is someone who cares for a person with special needs, providing ongoing, unpaid care and support.

“You may be family members dealing with the uncertainty, stress and sadness of watching your relative struggle with a debilitating mental illness, You may be sons, daughters, husbands, wives, lovers, friends and others adjusting to your loved one’s gradual loss of their personality or independence due to strokes, head injuries, AIDS, Parkinson’s, Alzheimer’s or other diseases. One thing you share in common is that you all experience loss at different times, and in different ways, as your journey unfolds.”

(Source: ‘An Unrecognised Grief – Loss and Grief Issues for Carers’ Carers Victoria)

Carers themselves face much loss and grief as their own lives are changed by the fact that they are a Carer – rarely a position that they thought they would find themselves in or one that they feel well equipped to handle.

Carers may grieve over the psychological, physical, financial and social effects that this role has created in their life:

- Work, study and career may have to be put on hold
- Hopes, plans, dreams of a perceived future may now not be possible
- Time for one’s own needs, rest, interests, freedom can be severely reduced
- Relationships with friends and family can be impacted
- There can be anxiety over financial difficulties
- The changed relationship with the person being cared for needs to be understood and managed.

Added to this, is the fact that the grief of a Carer can be ‘disenfranchised’ – when the losses aren’t recognised and the Carer’s issues are not seen as significant or needing support. Caring can then become a lonely experience fraught with feelings of anxiety, sadness, isolation, fear and helplessness. There may also be very real, and very normal, feelings of anger, rage, resentment and distress about being placed in this position and having to cope with so many issues which sometimes just keep accumulating – and it’s not unusual to feel animosity like this towards the person you are caring for.

If you know a Carer:

- Ask what you can do for *them* – practical things like cook *their* favourite meal, wash *their* car, walk *their* dog, water *their* garden, do *their* grocery shopping, empty *their* ironing basket ... don’t wait for them to ask you.
- Buy *them* a small gift, flowers or write a card that shows you recognise how hard *their* life can be
- Give *them* the gift of time – what can you do to give them the time to have their hair cut, go for a walk, visit a friend, without having to feel guilty or rush back home. Even having the time for a relaxing bath or sitting in the garden or reading a book can be a luxury.
- Sit and listen to *them* – let *them* let off steam, share *their* frustrations and tell you what’s on *their* mind right now.
- Helping to care for the Carer can be a much needed and appreciated role for friends.

Doris Zagdanski is the Convenor of MyGriefAssist website. She is a leading figure in modern day grief and loss education. She conducts educational seminars for both professional and community audiences. She has written several books in this genre and they are available at www.allaboutgrief.com