



*Helping
Handbooks*

Living with Loss:
When a loved
one dies in a
nursing home

If you have recently lost a loved one who was living in a nursing facility, you likely have many mixed feelings. Try to accept and acknowledge all your feelings, even if some seem contradictory.



You may, or may not, feel sadness or grief at your loss. Likely, you have been grieving for a long time for the person you knew when he or she was younger and active.

A feeling of relief is natural. Your loved one probably had become more dependent on others, including you, and less able to enjoy life.

You may feel helpless or angry.

Feelings of guilt and blame

Guilt is a common feeling whenever a loved one dies. If you look back to the decisions you made and actions you took, you can probably accept that you did the best you could, considering what you knew

at the time, and everything else that was going on at that time.

Try to let go of the feeling that you should have done more, and accept that you did the best you could.

Also, try to let go of any feeling of blame. If someone acted improperly or failed to act when they should have, you may need to take action to prevent someone else from being harmed. As soon as you have taken any needed action, try to move on. Feelings of guilt and blame will not do yourself, or your loved one, any good.

Filling the gap

If you devoted a lot of your time and energy to care for your loved one, his or her passing is likely to leave a hole in your life. You are likely to feel sadness at losing the positive parts of being a caregiver, such as feeling good about being able to help someone. As time goes on, find other activities that fill your need to feel useful, that give you the sense that you're helping and are important to someone.

An appropriate memorial

Respect your loved one's wishes regarding a memorial service (or lack of one), but don't hesitate to be creative in doing something additional to celebrate your loved one's life.

Ed arranged for a bench to be put up at a park his dad liked to visit. He invited family and friends to the park to see the bench, have a picnic and share memories of his dad's life. Some of those attending didn't know Ed's dad very well, but by the end of the picnic they knew him better.

A year after her mother's death, Joan got her family together to make special cookies her mother always made.

Jerry barbequed a rack of ribs, and brought them to the staff at the nursing station who cared for his wife during her last days.

Reach out

When you were busy caring for your loved one, you may have lost touch with family and friends. Now is the time to reach out, even if you had differences in the past, such as disagreement about the need for your loved one to move to a nursing home. Set aside the differences and reach



out to people who have been important to you. If you have been part of a religious community, church or temple, this is a good time to reach out to them. If anger at God gets on the way of your reaching out to the community, talk with a religious leader about your feelings.

It may help you to meet with others who have lost loved ones. Look in your local newspaper for listings of grief support groups, or contact your local hospital or hospice to find an appropriate group.

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