What’s Next After My Caregiver Journey Ends?

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August 19, 2020
Goals

- Consider grief’s impact on the post caresharing journey
- Learn about resilience and self-care
- Explore ways to construct identity in a “new normal” time
- Work on a personal plan for a “different reality”
There is no “cookbook” or “one size fits all” answer in dealing with the caregiver journey.
The journey of care sharing and beyond is a marathon not a sprint.
Grief and Loss

- Grief is normal and painful.
- Each person deals with losses and grief in their own way.
- People around you may not “get it.”
Grieving is not a linear process. It goes in cycles.

There may be no resolution to a loss.

Culture & family influence how loss and grief is experienced.

Some losses are obvious; some subtle.
Acknowledging and naming losses and grief are beneficial.

Current losses may expose past loss and grief, especially "unresolved grief."

Not dealing with difficult losses can lead to complicated grief.
Name losses you have experienced in being a care partner or that you face in not being a carer?
Loss Post Caregiving

- Relationship/companionship
- Remembered shared history
- Changed hopes and dreams
- Altered sense of meaning/purpose not doing direct care
Different roles

Changes in structured/unstructured time

Challenges in connection to others (Covid-19)
Grief Overload

- Adverse effects of many losses building up over time
- “Little” & “major” losses
- A sense of “too-muchness”
- A compounding of losses
Grief can feel like it is grey and stormy all the time....
Anticipatory Grief

- Grieving for coming losses
- Occurs incrementally
- Needs naming
- Puts persons in limbo
As caring progresses, losses accumulate.

There may not be an opportunity for resolution.

Unresolved grief prevents “moving on.”
- Grief can be frozen and “put on hold.”

- Is a roller coaster of losing/finding over and over

- “Emotional quicksand”

- Balancing present reality in face of the future
Uncertainties are difficult.

Need recognition and reflection

Requires “paradoxical” thinking

There is discomfort with unanswered questions.
Resilience

- Bouncing back from setbacks
- Returning to sense of balance
- A buffering factor in challenges
- Having future purpose
- Getting stronger in challenges
Ways to Build Resilience

- Make connections.
- Avoid seeing crises as insurmountable.
- Accept change as a part of living.
- Move toward goals.
Find a sense of purpose

Take decisive actions

Look for opportunities for self-discovery
Nurture a positive view of yourself

Keep things in perspective

Maintain a hopeful outlook

- Adapted from American Psychological Association
Internal Strengths

- Faith
- Humor
- Problem solving skills
- Family support
- "True Grit"
7 Guidelines for the Journey
Find Meaning

Balance Control with Acceptance

Broaden Your Identity

Manage Your Mixed Emotions
Hold On AND Let Go

Imagine New Hopes and Dreams

Take the Time to Mind Yourself

Pauline Boss (2011)
Discover Meaning

- Ask “who am I now?”
- Journal or tell stories.
- Stay in the “now” of feelings.
- Use positive channels to share.
Understand how you grieve ("feeling”/“doing.”) Blending them can help.

Look to religious/spiritual teachings.
Affirm “both/and” and because/therefore thinking.

It is ok to set boundaries! Don’t let others define you.
Balancing Control and Acceptance

» Control thinking and acting even as things change.

» Clarify what can be controlled and what cannot.

» Sometimes “letting go” is the way to stay in charge.
Expanding the Idea of “You”

“Revise your identity to fit the ambiguity.” (Boss 2011)

- Consider needs to forgive or ask forgiveness.
- Rethink and reframe roles.
I am...

not how I feel
not how I feel
connected to all
connected to all
fully alive
fully alive
my heart's desire
the love I seek
the courage I seek
embodiment of my true self
not an object
not an object
a unique individual
being here now
fully alive
not my thoughts and feelings
being here now
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a unique individual
safe from harm
fully alive
inherently valuable
fully alive
fully alive
completely enough
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Resist retreating from others

Reach out to and be honest with your supports. Use technology.

Build on resilience and inner strengths. Stay healthy.

Question family rules.
Understand Mixed Emotions

- Fear, anger, guilt, sadness and joy co-exist.
- Ambivalence is normal.
- Share tough feelings with trusted others.
Deep sadness is a normal part of grief in caring... It needs to be acknowledged and processed in a way that makes sense to you...
“Holding On” / “Letting Go”
- Be in the “here and now” even while planning the future.
- Attend to your own needs.
- Improve the space you are in.
- Let go of the unchangeable.
- Remember that you are doing/or did the best you could with what you knew at the time you were a carer.
- Avoid toxic relationships.
Imagining New Hopes and Dreams
- Affirm the “spiritual” and/or religious.

- Reflect on meaning and purpose.

- Remember that “moving on” with life does not mean “getting over” loss and grief.
Adapt family events to share positive experiences.

Simple rituals can mark changes and offer a way to deal with life transitions (consider ZOOM).

Joy can be shared in celebrations.
Self-Care is Key
Practice Self Care

- It’s a strength to care for yourself!

- It’s ok to worry but:
  Don’t ruminate
  Don’t catastrophize
  Harness worry into “what can I do now?”
Even Superman is Clark Kent most of the time!!
- Remember to breathe deeply and mindfully.
- Monitor the amount of information taken in.
- Get enough rest.
- Be honest with yourself and others about feelings.
Take time to deal with feelings. Don’t get pressured by others to feel a certain way.

Work on “unfinished business” and forgiveness.

Seek respite, and reach out to caring community.
Find support groups.

At times there is a need to “pull away” from life. Embrace the silence.

Consider professional help.
- Put on music, move and feel.
- Find moments of joy. Embrace the wonder of small things.
Use spiritual/religious practices and strengths.

Share your narrative. Write it down.

Use creative outlets, (poetry, visual arts, music).

Show compassion to yourself.
Where do I want to be in my journey?

What are my internal strengths in the “new normal”?

Who do I need to ask to assist me in my journey?
New life can spring forward on the journey after caring... Like a new plant shoot
Resources


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