



An Australian Government Initiative

Information for Carers

Feelings

Carers are usually family members or friends who provide support to children or adults who have a disability, mental illness, chronic condition or who are frail aged. Carers may be parents, partners, brothers, sisters, friends or children of any age.

Carers may care for a few hours a week or all day every day. Some carers are eligible for government benefits, while others are employed or have a private income.

The constant demands of caring and the many changes in family life may bring about a range of feelings and emotions. Some people may feel a sense of satisfaction about being a carer. Others may feel angry and overwhelmed at times. These emotions can be difficult to cope with.

? Different feelings

Carers may experience a range of different feelings, which surface from time to time. There are no right or wrong feelings. These feelings are a natural and normal reaction to caring.

All carers respond to the demands of caring in their own way. Feelings are always individual and everyone will react differently. Regard your feelings as signposts. They will tell you when things are not going well and need your attention.

Below are some of the feelings carers often say they experience.

Feeling Overwhelmed, Confused and Shocked by:

- the diagnosis of illness or disability, especially at first; and
- finding yourself caring and realising the changes this will bring to your life.

'I never expected this to happen. I didn't know what had hit me'

Feeling Guilty for:

- believing you bear some responsibility for the disability or illness;
- not wanting to be a carer;

- lost tempers and harsh words;
- being embarrassed by the person you care for;
- not being perfect;
- not doing enough;
- needing a break from caring; or
- placing the person you care for in residential care.

Feeling Love and Commitment for:

- the person you are caring for and the relationship you once had; or
- caring for someone you love.

Feeling Frustration and Anger at:

- having to be the carer;
- others in the family who don't do their fair share;
- the person being cared for;
- stigma that may surround the illness or disability;
- friends who don't make contact anymore;
- support services which don't provide enough help;
- the loneliness and isolation; or
- the focus always being on the person you care for.

'As much as I love him and care for him, sometimes I feel physically run down myself'.

Feeling Afraid about:

- what will happen if you don't cope;
- picking up your life after the caring role ends;
- what will happen if you die; or
- needing to learn new skills.

Feeling Sadness for:

- loss of a relationship – the parent, husband or wife, or child you once knew;
 - loss of the life you used to know and the sense of who you are;

- loss of the life you planned;
- loss of a sexual relationship with your partner; or
- loss of opportunities for the person you care for.

'I love my child dearly – it's a matter of coping and sometimes it's very hard'.

Grief is the emotional pain that comes about as a result of a loss or a number of losses. It may be one of the strongest feelings experienced by carers and often causes great distress. Grief can go unrecognised because there has been no death.

Recognising your grief and talking to someone about how you are feeling can help. If feelings of sadness persist for a long time, or affect your life to a great extent, contact your family doctor or community health centre.

'You have grief all your life whether you recognise it or not. All the expectations you have for your child have to be adjusted'.

Feeling Stressed

Stress is a part of our daily lives but too much stress can lead to physical and emotional exhaustion. Caring may mean being cut off from others and facing high stress over a very long period of time. Carers are very vulnerable to stress because of the demands of caring. Stress may bring physical symptoms such as headaches or difficulty sleeping. Some people become very emotional or anxious. Others report feeling persistently tired and chronically unwell.

We can't always do something about the causes of stress in our lives so it's important to learn to recognise stress and to try new ways of coping with it. Try some of the tips for taking good care of yourself listed at the end of this fact sheet or contact your **Commonwealth Carer Resource Centre** on **1800 242 636*** for information on techniques or courses for dealing with stress.





Feeling Depressed

Sometimes being a carer may feel like an endless grind. Over time you may stop feeling angry or sad about your situation and instead just feel numb. Even happy times don't seem to lift you and the simplest tasks seem to take too much energy. You may find you are sleeping too much or waking early or during the night. You might feel worthless or agitated most of the time and have difficulty making decisions.

These changes may be signs you are suffering from depression. Depression is a serious illness but is often overlooked. It is common and treatable. Talk to your doctor, who will help you find the treatment that works best for you.

? How can I deal with difficult feelings?

Feelings may become overwhelming and lead you to act in ways you don't like. It may become hard to think clearly about important decisions.

Just as feelings are individual so are ways of dealing with them. However, there is a way to deal with difficult feelings that many carers say is extremely helpful – talking to someone. Talking about problems can help, either to family and friends, to other carers in a support group or to a counsellor.

'I'm a very independent person, always have been. So asking for help was a really hard thing for me. Now I know there are people out there who will just listen to what I have to say'.

Support groups

Why join a support group?

- To meet others in a similar position.
- To have a break.
- To get information.
- For support.

Sharing ideas, feelings, worries, information and problems can help you feel less isolated. Sometimes family and friends don't understand the condition of the person you care for. People in the support group will understand.

Support groups bring together carers in local areas sometimes under the guidance of a facilitator. Often other carers or workers are invited to present information and training.

Your **Commonwealth Carer Resource Centre** can help put you in touch with carer support groups in your area. Contact them on **1800 242 636***.

Counselling

Counselling involves talking to someone who understands and can work with you to give you the encouragement, support and ideas to improve your situation. It may be a way to assist with the many changes in your relationships and roles as well as dealing with the strong feelings associated with caring.

Counselling may involve just you and the counsellor, either face-to-face or over the telephone, so it's important you feel comfortable with the counsellor you choose. Anything said is completely confidential, so it's a good chance to talk about those things you may feel you can't raise with family or friends.

Counselling usually involves a limited number of sessions but will vary according to your needs. Some counselling services are free. Private counsellors charge a fee although many are willing to negotiate their costs.

Your local doctor, community health centre, council or service provider may be able to assist.

Condition-specific Associations

There are many organisations that specialise in support for specific conditions. You may like to talk to workers in these associations as they will understand the condition of the person you care for and the demands it makes on you. Many associations publish regular newsletters. Reading these may be another good way to get information and support.

How can I find out what services can help me with my difficult feelings?

Commonwealth Carer Resource Centre	1800 242 636*
Relationships Australia	1300 364 277#
Lifeline	13 11 14#
Kids Helpline	1800 551 800*
Dementia Helpline	1800 639 331*

Take care of yourself

Planning for breaks

You cannot care constantly without a break. It can be difficult so ask for help. Ask family and friends and respite care services but make sure the breaks are regular and frequent. Contact your local **Commonwealth Carer Respite Centre** on **1800 059 059*** to discuss what respite options are available for you and for the person you care for.

Planning for health

Regular exercise, rest and nutritious food are all necessary in order to withstand stress. Try to plan your day so you get all three.

- Walking, swimming, yoga, gardening or dancing are good ways to get some gentle exercise.
- Learning to relax by listening to pleasant music, meditating or specific relaxation exercises can help you sleep better.
- Trying new vegetables or fruit, eating at regular times and looking for new recipes are good ways of making eating well easier.

'You need a sense of humour. Sometimes a laugh helps relieve the stress.'

Planning to keep friendships and interests

Try to relax and enjoy yourself. Maintain an identity of your own separate from the person you care for. Keep your links to the world outside. Absorbing interests, having fun and relaxation are all good for your physical and mental health.

Where can I get more information?

There is a lot more information for carers available on a range of topics. Commonwealth Carer Resource Centres in each state and territory provide carers with referral to services and practical written information to support them in their caring role. Contact your **Commonwealth Carer Resource Centre** on **1800 242 636***.

Alternatively, carers may use the services provided by the carer association in each state or territory.

The **Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS)** can help you if you need assistance with a language other than English. TIS can be contacted on **13 14 50#**.

COMMONWEALTH CARER RESOURCE CENTRE
1800 242 636*



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*Free call from local phones, mobile calls at mobile rates

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A national network of carers associations
www.carersaustralia.com.au