

# Feelings

**This help sheet is about feelings commonly felt by families and carers of people with dementia. These may include feelings of guilt, grief, loss or anger. There are services available to you that can help.**

Caring for someone with dementia can be rewarding. It can also be challenging, life-changing and stressful. At times it may feel overwhelming.

You may have many different feelings over time as the person's needs change. As dementia gradually causes their abilities and personality to change, the nature of your relationship with them will change too.

There is no simple way to deal with these feelings, but it may help to know that the complex and varied emotions you feel are completely normal.

## **Dementia Australia is here for you**

We know it can be tough. That's why we're here to help. You are not alone.

## **Your feelings**

Some of the most common feelings experienced by families and carers are guilt, grief and loss and anger.

## **Guilt**

It's common to feel guilty.

You might feel guilty about the way the person with dementia was treated in the past, or by being embarrassed by their behaviour. You may feel guilty about losing your temper, or not wanting to be responsible for someone living with dementia.

You might feel guilty about spending less time with family and friends while you care for your loved one.

If the person goes into hospital or residential care, you may feel guilty that you have not kept them at home for longer, even though you have done everything you could. It is common to feel guilty about promises to always look after someone even when that is not possible.

## **Grief and loss**

Grief is an emotional response to loss. It is an individual feeling and different people will feel it differently at various times. It will not always get easier with the passage of time.

If someone close to us develops dementia, we are faced with losing the person as we knew them and the relationship we had.

People caring for partners may experience grief at losing the future they planned to share together.

## **Anger**

Feeling angry is a natural response. You might feel anger about being a carer. Or you might feel angry towards:

- others who do not seem to be helping out
- the person with dementia when the condition affects their behaviour
- support services
- yourself when you feel the care you provide is not good enough.

It's normal to feel distress, resentment, frustration, guilt, exhaustion and annoyance.

But if you feel like shaking, pushing or hitting your loved one, or that you could lose control, it is important to remove yourself from the situation.

Discuss your feelings with someone such as your doctor or a Dementia Australia counsellor. Discussions with doctors and counsellors are confidential.

## Dealing with feelings

Let yourself fully experience whatever you are feeling, no matter what that is. Denying feelings intensifies whatever you are experiencing. You may find some of the following ideas helpful:

- **Cry:** Crying can be a response to a range of emotions. It can help relieve your sadness.
- **Talk:** Talking about your feelings will help, even at the most difficult times. It can be useful to talk with someone outside your family, such as a counsellor or support group.
- **Take a break:** Try to get breaks from caring so that you do not get worn down. Ask family and friends for help and contact community or government support services to organise regular breaks.
- **Write in a journal:** Record your private thoughts and feelings in a journal or diary to help you process how you are feeling.
- **Let go:** Let go of bitterness and resentment. If there is a source of anger, try to resolve it.
- **Find comfort:** People have different ways of finding comfort. Many find comfort in rituals, prayers and meditation or other activities such as being around family and friends.
- **Hold off:** Avoid making hasty decisions and thoroughly explore all options before taking major steps.
- **Be kind to yourself:** Develop self-compassion. Be patient with your feelings and find a balance between being happy and sad, angry and calm, guilty and glad.
- **Learn to laugh again:** Rediscover your sense of humour. Finding joy in life can help in continuing to experience and share happy times.

## Support groups

Many organisations throughout Australia offer support groups for carers, in person and online.

Support groups bring together families, carers and friends of people with dementia. Joining a support group is a great way to share knowledge, tips and strategies with others who are going through a similar experience.

Dementia Australia support groups are led by a facilitator, usually a health professional.

## Where to get help

### National Dementia Helpline

The National Dementia Helpline is a free telephone service that provides information, advice, counselling and carer support. Ask about support groups and programs for family and carers.

Call: **1800 100 500**

Visit: [dementia.org.au/helpline](https://dementia.org.au/helpline)

### Carer Gateway

Carer Gateway provides free practical information, resources, education and counselling to support carers.

Call: **1800 422 737**

Visit: [carergateway.gov.au](https://carergateway.gov.au)

## Additional reading and resources

- **Dementia Australia library service**  
Visit: [dementia.org.au/library](https://dementia.org.au/library)
- **Dementia Australia support**  
Visit: [dementia.org.au/support/family-and-carers](https://dementia.org.au/support/family-and-carers)
- **Dementia Australia counselling**  
Visit: [dementia.org.au/support/counselling](https://dementia.org.au/support/counselling)

### Further information

Dementia Australia offers support, information, education and counselling.

**National Dementia Helpline: 1800 100 500**

**For language assistance: 131 450**

**Visit our website: [dementia.org.au](https://dementia.org.au)**