

## Guilt and Grief When Moving Your Loved One to a Care Facility

**FACT:** Guilt and grief are among the most challenging feelings caregivers must face when transitioning from home to a care facility.

**Guilt** is often tied to the belief that you “should” be able to care for your loved one until the very end. All caregivers have limits, and there comes a time when professional assistance is best for all involved. Feelings of guilt can also be influenced by your loved one’s seeming improvement after placement, causing you to second-guess your decision. Perhaps you feel guilty because you broke a spoken or unspoken “promise” never to place your loved one in a nursing home. Perhaps you sense that others judge you negatively for this decision, or that your loved one is unhappy in this new environment. It is also common to feel a sense of relief after placement – “now I can finally relax!” Beware of “should” statements that cause you to second-guess yourself. Few caregivers are able to approach moving a loved one lightly. Some guilt feelings are normal and not evidence of failure.

**Grief** is an emotional, physical and/or thought-based reaction to perceived loss and change. We grieve in order to adjust and come to terms with loss that matters in our lives. Many losses occur along the Alzheimer’s journey. Like guilt, grief reactions are normal and to be expected. It is true that the sadness of grief can be overwhelming at times. Placement changes your pattern of living and providing care. An important challenge is learning how to live as yourself, separated from your loved one, yet still very much apart of his or her life.

### How to Overcome Guilt and Grief

- Know that these are normal reactions that originate in the love and care you feel for your loved one.
- Know that it is common to feel conflicting emotions. It’s OK to feel love and anger at the same time.
- Reach out for support from those you trust about your grief, guilt, and/or any other emotions you are experiencing surrounding moving your loved one.
- If others are against the move, learn about your options and discuss everyone’s views and feelings together by contacting the Alzheimer’s Association to arrange a Care Consultation session (a meeting with a Social Worker).
- Keep a journal. Write down the stressful events you have endured in addition to the proud moments you have experienced throughout the journey of caring for your loved one. Write at least one positive entry each day.
- Think about what you expect from yourself. Ask yourself: “Is what I am feeling truly realistic? What do guilty feelings accomplish for me? What do they accomplish for my loved one?”
- Research information on how to choose a nursing home. There are books and brochures offered through the Alzheimer’s Association that have tips on what to look for and questions to ask. These can be accessed by visiting the website or calling the 24/Hour Helpline.
- Take into consideration that having 24-hour care in a safe environment will help everyone involved, most of all, your loved one with dementia.

- Your loved one will benefit from the structure and stimulation of nursing home activities and a daily routine in an accepting and understanding environment. This will also give them the opportunity to socialize with other people who are in similar shoes as they are.
- This is a chance for you to take care of your own physical, spiritual, social, and emotional needs that have possibly been neglected; as you know that your loved one is in a safe environment where others can help provide the care and supervision he or she needs.

### **After The Move**

- Accept that your feelings and reactions are normal. Be open with yourself and others about how you feel.
- Allow yourself time - these difficult feelings will lessen and pass with time.
- Recognize your “new” relationship with your loved one. You will still be your loved one’s caregiver but others are now available around the clock to help with the physical care and to assure your loved one is safe. You will be your loved one’s voice at their new home and you can make the most of the time you spend with them.
- Try not to do everything at once right after the move.
- Be intentional in taking the time to do one pleasant thing for yourself every day.
- Make a plan, or coordinate a schedule, for your loved one to have frequent visits from others as well as yourself.
- Take action to develop good relations with those who are responsible for your loved one’s physical care.
- Only you know how to best deal with negative feelings. Take time to talk to a friend, a counselor, or spiritual leader.
- Connect with other caregivers, family members and friends impacted by Alzheimer’s. Consider joining a support group to meet others who are coping with similar situations. A listing of Support Groups can be found on our website or by calling the Helpline.

### **Suggested books on this topic available through the Alzheimer’s Association for checkout:**

- *Searching for Normal Feelings* by Doug Manning
- *Moving a Relative with Memory Loss*
- *Making the Decision to Move: When Love Gets Tough* by Doug Manning
- *Living Well in a Nursing Home: Everything You and Your Folks Need to Know* by Lynn Dickenson and Xenia Vosen
- *Promises to Keep: The Families Role in Nursing Home Care* by Katherine Karr
- *What’s Happening to Grandpa?* by Maria Shriver (Childrens Book)
- *My Grandpa’s in a Nursing Home* by Judy Delton and Dorothy Tucker (Youth Book)