

Relationships and children

Roles within a family may be affected with the diagnosis of advanced disease; there will be good days and not so good days.

Why relationships change

Relationships may change or become strained for many reasons including;

- The person you are caring for is becoming more dependent and may find it difficult to lose their independence. They may be angry or distressed and may take this out on you
- You may find that you are suddenly taking on new tasks (that the person you are caring for would usually do) and this can be overwhelming
- You and the person you are caring for may be spending more time together, they may need more from you, and that can also increase tensions between you and the person you are caring for
- You may be tired, sick, or distressed
- The person you are caring for may be in pain or physical discomfort, feeling very tired, or worried or depressed
- You may both be grieving. Grieving for the loss of a shared future, grieving for the person's independence, grieving for your old relationship (which may now have changed), and more
- The personality of the person you are caring for may have changed due to their illness
- You may be juggling multiple responsibilities (children, work, other family members) and the demands of caring for a person at the end of life
- You and the person you are caring for may have different views on their treatment, services, or their location of care

- Other family members may have different views on the person's care or may be experiencing distress at the situation and taking it out on you
- You may need to communicate with family members who you have lost contact with or have a difficult relationship with
- Previous family arguments may come up again or new disagreements related to roles of caring, making decisions about care, or estate planning.

Talking about your relationship

Try to maintain your relationships by using good communication skills and making time to communicate with each other.

- Be open and honest about the illness
- Talk about your feelings and acknowledge when things are hard



- Be sensitive to how each other are feeling (be aware that you are both going through something that is very difficult)
- Try to continue to do the things you have always done together
- Take time out – use respite services, family and friends for support
- Seek help from health professionals
- Try and continue doing positive things together
- Hold regular family meetings or updates
- Invite family members to assist in specific ways

Developing deeper relationships

Caring for someone at the end of their life can also be an opportunity to improve relationships, make stronger connections with others, and deepen the relationship you have with the person you are caring for. It can be an opportunity to reflect on the person's life as well as create new and special memories together. It can be an opportunity for families to work together and strengthen family bonds.



Keeping children involved

It's best to be open with children, rather than say nothing. Children are very perceptive and will know something is wrong. Providing simple and factual information in a calm and reassuring way is usually the best approach.

“Your grandma is very sick. Her heart is not working very well and she may not get better. The doctors are making sure that she has medicine so that it doesn't hurt. But she feels very tired and needs to spend time in bed now.”

“She would love to see you and have a cuddle. Perhaps you could also draw her a picture. She would really like that.”

Kids will often ask whether the person will die. Younger children are often very matter-of-fact about death. An honest response to the question is generally best.

“Yes, she is going to die soon. It is very sad for all of us. We will miss her but we can still think of her often and remember her. Would you like to spend a bit of time with her?”

Kids may also feel overwhelmed or uncomfortable with the changes to the person, the equipment, or feel worried about them. Reassure them that the person is comfortable and the changes to them are a normal part of the dying process. Do not force them to be involved if they are uncomfortable.

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