

Adjustment Following Placement

One of the most difficult times for the spouse of an Alzheimer's disease victim is that period following placement of a husband or wife in a nursing home. Difficult personal and social readjustments are required. Coping with separation presents very real problems for the spouse, who is neither widowed nor divorced, yet must face feelings of loss, loneliness, and guilt which accompany the decision-making process and the actual experience of nursing home placement.

The well spouse may find it very difficult to relinquish the day-to-day responsibility for the care of the loved one. This can be compared to the mixed feelings of relief and loss experienced by a mother whose children may have left home. But in this situation, placement marks the end of a long hard fight to maintain a person at home, the end of years of companionship which are not over but cannot be retrieved. The loneliness and emptiness spells an "end which is not an end". One's caregiving role is not completely over – visits to the nursing home can be extremely difficult, even in those homes where the staff try to make visits as pleasant as possible.

Feelings of relief from the burden of care are often mixed with guilt, self-doubt and ambivalence, even though the caregiver "knows" he/she has done the best he/she can. As one friend who has been through this experience remarked, "This is the stage in which you will shed more tears than you ever have before."

How will I handle this separation? How will I go on with life? Who am I? Constant reminders of loss must be dealt with. Little things like going to the supermarket and "buying for one" can be very hard.

Socially the question of how to lead one's life comes up again and again. One must constantly make decisions about going out with friends, going to parties, and in general resuming activities which have been given up for years. What one does will depend on individual circumstances. Even good friends need to be told just how active you want to be and how comfortable you will feel in different situations.

Nursing home Placement is a time when new adjustments have to be made and new ways have to be developed. Good friends and other social supports may ease the way through a very difficult and possibly frightening time.

Although this is a time of crisis, it can become a time of growth, when personal capacities and inner resources can be used to cope with new challenges and new options for living one's life.

Courtesy Alzheimer's Association,
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