

Looking after a loved one who is gradually disintegrating as a person, while one's lifestyle is becoming increasingly restricted, isolated and exhausting, triggers a whole range of emotions in the carer. It is helpful to acknowledge that these emotions are perfectly normal.

### ■ Grief

As the patient's illness progresses, you may experience the loss of a companion, the loss of an important relationship and the loss of how things were. In one sense it is like a loved one having died, but in another sense they are still there. Just when you think you have adjusted, you may find the patient has changed and you go through the grieving experience again. Allow these feelings to come out; try not to bottle them up. It *is* very sad.

### ■ Guilt

It is common to feel guilty at losing your temper with the sufferer, to feel guilty about being embarrassed at their odd behaviour, guilty for not wanting the responsibility, guilty for placing them in a home or in hospital and for feeling relief when they are not there. It is important to recognise those feelings so that you can make clear-minded decisions about the future, and do what is best for the whole family. Don't expect yourself to be perfect!

### ■ Anger and aggression

It is natural to feel angry and frustrated: angry that it has happened to you; angry that others don't seem to be helping out; angry at the sufferer for his or her difficult behaviour; angry at inadequate services; angry at the role-reversal that may have taken place. It is helpful to share you feeling with others. It is also useful to recognise an increase in these feelings as a signal that you need a break or more help. Also it is helpful to try to distinguish between being angry at the sufferer's behaviour and being angry at the person. Dementia sufferers are ill and can't help their behaviour. Remember that this difficult behaviour is not aimed at you personally.

### ■ Embarrassment

It is easy to get embarrassed if your relative is screaming and shouting. Perhaps the walls are thin and you find yourself thinking, 'I don't know what the neighbours will be thinking'. It helps to explain the illness to them, as most people are quite ignorant of the effect of Alzheimer's disease. Real friends will be able to overcome the embarrassment caused by the sufferer's poor table manners, sloppiness or repetition.

### ■ Mixed feelings

The majority of carers experience a mixture of negative and positive feelings. The positive feelings are based on the strength of the previous relationship and the satisfaction of caring for a loved one. Intense mixed feelings indicate a relationship that really matters. Bottling up mixed feelings does not help. On the other hand, expressing negative feelings in an uncontrolled outburst is not always helpful. The best way is perhaps the middle road of expressing feelings in a safe way by talking to a good friend or confidant, or somebody else in a similar position.