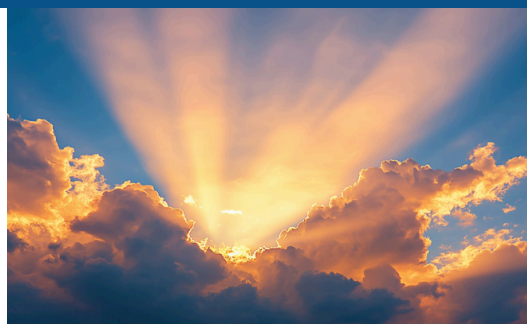
KEARNEY COUNTY
HEALTH SERVICES
Senior Life Solutions

LIFE AFTER CAREGIVING: REBUILDING IDENTITY AND ROUTINE



Caregiving can shape nearly every part of daily life. Appointments, medications, meals, transportation, household responsibilities, and safety concerns may fill the day. Over time, caregiving can influence how you spend your time, how you relate to others, and how you think about yourself.

When that role ends, life may suddenly feel unfamiliar. A loved one may have died, moved into a residential care setting, or recovered enough to need less assistance. Each circumstance is different, yet many former caregivers face a similar question: What comes next?

The answer may take time. Rebuilding life after caregiving often happens gradually, through small changes in routine, relationships, and personal goals.

MAKING ROOM FOR MIXED EMOTIONS

The end of caregiving can bring several emotions at once. You may feel sadness, grief, relief, guilt, anger, loneliness, or uncertainty. You may feel proud of the care you provided while also recognizing how exhausted you became.

Relief can coexist with love. It may reflect the strain of managing ongoing responsibilities, interrupted sleep, difficult decisions, and concern for another person's well-being. Some caregivers also feel guilty when they begin to enjoy activities or make plans for themselves again.

There is no required emotional response to the end of caregiving. Your experience may also change from day to day. A morning that feels hopeful may be followed by an afternoon filled with grief. A familiar song, appointment reminder or empty chair may bring back memories of your caregiving routine.

Check out the next page for more.

Try to approach these emotions with patience. Journaling, talking with a trusted friend, joining a support group, or speaking with a mental health professional may help you understand what you are experiencing.

IF CAREGIVING WAS PART OF YOUR IDENTITY

Caregiving may begin as one responsibility among many. Over time, it can become a central part of your identity. You may have become the person who knew the medication schedule, asked questions during medical visits, managed finances, or made sure each day went as smoothly as possible. Family members and health care professionals may have regularly turned to you for information and decisions.

When the role ends, the loss of responsibility can also feel like a loss of purpose. You may wonder where you are needed or how to describe this stage of your life.

Your caregiving experience remains part of your story. It may have strengthened qualities such as patience, persistence, advocacy, organization, and compassion. As you move forward, those qualities can support new relationships, interests, and goals.

Consider reflecting on a few questions:

- What parts of myself received less attention while I was caregiving?
- What activities did I once enjoy?
- What plans or interests did I postpone?
- Which relationships would I like to strengthen?
- What would I like my days to include now?

You don't need to know the answers immediately. The idea is to begin noticing possibilities.

CREATING A NEW DAILY STRUCTURE

After caregiving ends, open time may feel uncomfortable. A new routine can provide stability. Begin with a few dependable points in the day, such as waking and going to bed at consistent times, eating regular meals, and scheduling one activity outside the home each week.

RECONNECTING WITH OTHER PEOPLE

Caregiving can gradually narrow a person's social world. Consider calling one person, attending a familiar community activity, or accepting a brief invitation. A cup of coffee, a walk, a faith community gathering, a library program, or a local senior center activity can provide an opportunity to reconnect.

RECOGNIZING WHEN ADDITIONAL SUPPORT MAY HELP

Many former caregivers experience periods of sadness, worry, or uncertainty. Additional support may be helpful when emotional changes persist, intensify, or interfere with daily life.

Consider speaking with a health care provider or mental health professional if you are experiencing ongoing isolation, frequent anxiety, irritability, loss of interest, significant changes in sleep or appetite, difficulty completing daily tasks, or a persistent sense of hopelessness. Help is available.

WE CAN HELP.

Our hospital-based outpatient program is designed to meet the unique needs of older adults experiencing depression and/or anxiety related to life changes that are often associated with aging or a chronic diagnosis. Anyone can make a referral to our program, including self-referrals, provider referrals, or community consultations.

Call us today at (308) 832-3400, Option #4