



# The importance of rediscovering a life for yourself

## Your life in change

Caring does not cease when your family member is admitted into residential care. However your life does change completely.

Initially your energy will go into settling your family member into their new home and learning how the facility works. This can be a busy, all-consuming time.

The challenge that lies ahead is to rediscover a life for yourself - one that involves friendships, interests and activities inside and outside of the facility. It can be difficult to know where to start.

Think about the following:

- ▣ Re-connect with old friends.
- ▣ Get to know other carers in residential care.
- ▣ Join a local club or group or take up an activity you'd like to do.
- ▣ Find interests that you can enjoy at home when alone.
- ▣ Take up employment or volunteer work.
- ▣ Look for things you can enjoy with your family member in residential care - things you can share together.
- ▣ Get involved in activities at the facility - it will benefit you and your family member.

Helpful ideas and suggestions are available in the information sheets 'How to find your new carer role in residential care' and 'More opportunities for carers in residential care'.

*"I repainted some of the walls in our house.  
It was my way of creating a new life within our old one."*

## Why is this so hard?

The thought of rediscovering a life for yourself can be daunting and confronting. It can evoke feelings of guilt and uneasiness. There are good reasons for this:

- ▣ Carers are not used to putting themselves first.
- ▣ You may still be asking, 'Why them? Why not me?'
- ▣ You may still feel uncertain, anxious and guilty about the decision for residential care.
- ▣ Life outside of caring is unknown and can be frightening.
- ▣ You may need time before stepping back a little from caring.

It's natural to experience feelings of loss and grief at this time - loss of your family member as a companion at home, loss of your clearly defined role of carer, loss of direction. Having to focus on yourself and answer questions about 'where to now' is difficult.

Carers offer the following suggestions:

- ▣ Have a health check up - make this a priority.
- ▣ Talk to your GP about your concerns and how you're feeling.
- ▣ Give yourself time to find a balance in life that works for you.
- ▣ Expect your mixed emotions to continue for a while.
- ▣ Expect uneasiness at first, when stepping out on your own.
- ▣ Take small steps - do things that seem daunting but 'do-able'.
- ▣ Be proud of each step you take, no matter how small.
- ▣ Get to know other carers and learn from them.



Talk to someone who understands, perhaps another carer or the Commonwealth Carer Resource Centre - ph: 1800 242 636\*. Ask about the National Carer Counselling Program, which can be a great support to carers who are struggling with these issues.

*"I felt guilty about doing things that I enjoyed,  
when Graham couldn't join me.  
It helped when I talked to the counsellor."*

## How family and friends can help

Family and friends can be a great support to you in rediscovering your life. But if you don't ask for their help they may not know you need it.

Carers suggest:

- ▣ Talk to family and friends about how you're feeling and the challenges you face.
- ▣ Allow them to support you on the bad days as well as the good.
- ▣ Ask them for help in connecting with old friends or in starting up a new activity.
- ▣ Look for ways to get more involved with your friends and family:
  - ▣ Start up old routines, like Sunday night dinner together.
  - ▣ Spend more time with your children or grandchildren.
  - ▣ Organise a social event, like a BBQ or afternoon tea.
  - ▣ Help out family and friends where you can.

## Further information:

- ▣ [Commonwealth Carer Resource Centre](#) - ph: 1800 242 636\*. For information, support and advice, or to find out about other information sheets in this series.
- ▣ [National Carer Counselling Program](#) - ph: 1800 242 636\*.

\*Free call except from mobile phones. Mobile calls at mobile rates.

We do our best to keep these links up to date, but the internet changes all the time. If you can no longer access any of the above resources, please go to our [Internet Troubleshooting Guide](#), or email us at [website@carersvic.org.au](mailto:website@carersvic.org.au)