

# Coping With Change & Loss

---

Cancer often disrupts, at least temporarily, the many roles we have in life (e.g., parent, partner, friend, employee, etc.) Treatment may impose limitations on your ability to do things on your own or in the way you do things. Some people may feel like cancer is forcing them to put “my life on hold” because they can’t do the things they are used to doing. Our roles in life give us a sense of who we are and when these roles are disrupted it is common to experience lowered self-esteem and/or feelings of guilt, worthlessness, anger or frustration.

## Ways to Cope with Changing Roles:

- Talk to others about your feelings.
- Give yourself time to adjust.
- Ask others for help when needed.
  
- Be specific when telling others what you need. (Example: “Can you please cook dinner on Tuesday?”)
- Look for positive changes that may come with changing roles (e.g., having more time to spend with your family) and take advantage of them.
- Re-define your role &/or responsibility. You may not be able to do certain tasks in the way you are used to, but you likely are still able to contribute and feel productive in a different or new way.
- Prioritize tasks: What really needs to get done today and what can wait?
- Expect some “trial and error” as roles change and family members/friends take on new responsibilities.
- Remember, change is not an entirely smooth process. Adjustments will be made as you go along.
- Take time each day to do something that makes you feel good.
  
- Find the humor in the situation whenever you can. (e.g., Did your partner burn the toast when trying to make breakfast?)
  
- Remind yourself that your worth does not only come from the specific things you do, but from who you are as a person.

Grief is a natural response to loss. It’s the emotional suffering you feel when something or someone you love is taken away. You may associate grief with the death of a loved one – and this type of loss may cause intense grief. Yet, any loss can cause grief, including:

- Loss of health
- Losing a job
- Loss of financial stability
- A relationship breakup
- A miscarriage
- Death of a pet
- Loss of a cherished dream
- A loved one’s serious illness
- Loss of a friendship
- Loss of safety after a trauma

## What is anticipatory grief?

Anticipatory grief is a feeling of loss before a death or dreaded event occurs.

# Coping With Change & Loss

---

## What are some symptoms of grief and anticipatory grief?

Losing someone or something you love is very painful. After a loss, you may experience all kinds of difficult and surprising symptoms and signs including:

- Shock
- Anger
- Guilt
- Tearfulness
- Lack of energy
- Headaches
- Stomach aches
- Difficulty sleeping
- Difficulty eating
- Blaming others

People who are grieving may find that: grief goes on much longer than they imagined, there are no quick fixes or specific ways to grieve, each person has to work through his or her grief and in his or her own way. Grief never really goes away, but may feel differently over time.

## Here are some tips for coping with loss & change:

Take Care of yourself:

- Acknowledge your feelings.
- Express your feelings in a tangible or creative way (e.g., write in a journal, draw, make a collage).
- Look after your physical health.
- Move around/exercise. Some people find it helpful to release their emotions through physical activities.
- Take time to sit quietly to think about your experiences, breathe deeply, listen to music or read.
- Remember there is no one way to feel. Be gentle with yourself if/when your emotions change.
- Grief can be a powerful emotion that often makes us feel “out of control.” Take control of your grief by scheduling specific times to grieve. This allows you to have control over the grief while also giving you “a break” from grieving during non-scheduled times.
- 

Get support:

- Talk to family members and friends about your thoughts and feelings and specific things they may do to assist you in adjusting to change.
- Or, simply be with others. Often just being around others is comforting. You/they don't necessarily have to “do” anything.
- Draw comfort from your spirituality or faith.
- Join a support group. \* A member of your medical team can provide you with support group information.
- Consider talking to a psychologist.