

NAVIGATING THE EMOTIONAL JOURNEY OF DEMENTIA CAREGIVING

Written by the Manitoba Métis Federation - Health and Wellness Department

Caring for someone living with dementia is a sensitive journey. It can bring moments of sorrow, stress, and uncertainty. As Red River Métis, we are guided by the values of kindness, respect, and caring for one another. These values also apply to how we care for ourselves. As caregivers, your well-being is important too. By caring for your emotional, mental, and physical health, you are honouring both yourself and those you support.

Let us explore the emotional stages of caregiving and how we can care for ourselves along the way.



THE EARLY STAGES

Confusion, Grief, and Denial

When memory changes first appear, it can be confusing. You might notice your loved one forgetting things more often, struggling with familiar tasks, or acting differently.

Once a diagnosis is given, a quiet grief may follow. Knowing things will change, and that the person you love may slowly face a decline in their health can bring fear, sadness, and uncertainty.



How to care for yourself in this stage:

- ∞ Learning about dementia through trusted sources can help you understand what's happening and help you prepare for the journey.
- ∞ Talking to friend, family member, Elder, or counsellor can help you carry the emotional load.
- ∞ Being gentle with yourself and knowing it okay to feel grief or confusion.



THE MIDDLE STAGES

Stress, Guilt, and Isolation

As dementia progresses, caregiving becomes more demanding. You may now be helping with dressing, meals, medication, or keeping your loved one safe. It can feel like your entire life is centred around their needs.

In this stage, there may be guilt for feeling tired, for needing a break, or for not always being patient. You may also feel alone, especially if others don't understand what you're going through.



How to care for yourself in this stage:

- ∞ Taking regular breaks can help your body and mind recharge.
- ∞ Reaching out to family, friends, or support services.
- ∞ Talking to someone who has walked a similar path like a caregiver support group or a trusted friend can help you feel seen and understood.
- ∞ Wanting rest or time away doesn't mean you love your person any less. Let go of the guilt.

03

THE LATER STAGES

Letting Go and Finding Meaning

In the later stages, your loved one may no longer recognize you or speak in ways they used to. Their world becomes smaller, and your role shifts from guiding to being present and patient.



How to care for yourself in this stage:

- ∞ Share a meal together or listen to music you both enjoy. Let these moments restore your peace.
- ∞ Connecting to the culture with activities like beading, being on the land, or talking with Elders can help you stay grounded.
- ∞ Allow yourself to grieve: It's okay to feel the loss of the person they once were, even while they are still with you.

04

AFTER CAREGIVING

The Silent Grief

When caregiving ends, your loved one could have moved into full-time care or passed away. You may miss the routine, the closeness, or even the purpose caregiving gave you.



How to care for yourself in this stage:

- ∞ Take time to rest as you need recovery after so much giving.
- ∞ Share your story, write about your experiences, or talk with others.
- ∞ Reconnect with your own identity: You are still a person with dreams, and life beyond caregiving.
- ∞ Seek support if needed to move forward.

YOU ARE NOT ALONE

The Health and Wellness Department of the MMF is here to support you. We are working to ensure that caregivers are not forgotten, but recognized, respected, and cared for too.

If you need Mental Health Support, you can contact our Mental Wellness Support Line at **1-833-390-1041 ext. 1**. If you have any questions or concerns, contact us at healthresearch@mmf.mb.ca

