



# Life After Caring

We ask the experts what happens next when a carer finds themselves alone...

## FIRST STEPS

### Dealing with Grief

Of course, one of the main issues former carers face is dealing with loss. According to Chloe Wright, policy manager at Carers UK, "Grief is a very individual thing and everyone deals with it in different ways. At Carers UK we often refer people to specialist bereavement support, or encourage them to speak to their GP."

### Reaching Out

As well as grief counselling, many find talking to others in similar situations to be very useful. "Often local carers' organisations have former carers' groups; we also have an online forum at Carers UK," says Chloe. "Talking to someone who's been there can be a great comfort."

### Practical Help

It is important, too, to organise finances in the wake of a bereavement or

change in circumstances. "If you were receiving benefits such as Carers' Allowance, that will come to an end," explains Chloe. "We suggest that carers get a benefits check and let the DWP know that they've had a change of circumstances."

### Looking After Yourself

People who provide care for more than 50 hours per week are twice as likely as non-carers to suffer poor health. It is important that carers take time to recover, both physically and mentally. "We often suggest that carers take a break after their role has finished to give themselves time to recover physically and mentally," says Chloe.

Psychotherapist Hilda Burke agrees that it's important to take time to "be sympathetic to yourself" and "accept that you might not feel brilliant straight away." Being honest and attending to your own needs is key.

## MOVING FORWARD

### Finding New Purpose

As a busy carer, suddenly having time on your hands can be a challenge in itself. Try not to be tempted to fill the void immediately, without processing your feelings. "If you do take on another project, make sure you feel it's worthwhile, rather than a way to escape negative feelings," explains Hilda. "You need to process your emotions rather than suppress them."

When you do feel ready, many former carers find that voluntary work can provide useful social interaction and fulfilment. "Carers UK have a very active volunteer programme, and many charities have similar initiatives. It's a chance to use the skills you've learned and share them with others," says Chloe.

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### Re-Entering the Workplace

While many former carers feel the time they've spent out of the workplace might

result in a loss of skills, it is important to remember the new workplace-ready skills they have acquired while caring. "We try to encourage carers to consider the skills they've developed: time management, organising someone's care, managing a personal care budget, as well as physical caring skills," says Chloe.

### Dealing with Anxieties

Many find returning to work or beginning a voluntary role after a break to be nerve-racking, but it's important to remember that most of us already have the resources to deal with a significant life change. "When you became a carer, you would have faced and overcome many challenges," says Hilda. "It can be useful to remember that we've overcome such obstacles in the past."



## "A Few Tasks Each Day"

Pippa Clewer (59) cared for both of her parents for 18 months until their deaths in 2013.

"You become very insular when caring. You don't really want to jump back into society again, it's too much emotionally and sometimes physically. Family, friends and other care providers who may have been around move on, and you're left."

"I found that tackling a few practical tasks each day – with support – was the best way forward. I also joined a health club with my son – I needed to relax and build myself up again."

"It took a year to start feeling a bit more normal."



It took Pippa a year to start recovering



Janice now travels to visit friends

## "Doing Things Alone Took Courage"

Janice Fox (74) cared for her husband for six months before his death. Her poem *Your Carer is Left* was recently published in a creative anthology produced by Carers UK.

"I didn't define myself as a carer. I was a woman in love, wanting to do everything possible to make the most of our time together. When my husband died, it took a lot of courage to start doing things on my own. But a chance meeting led

to my becoming friends with a young couple who were expecting. They invited me to look after their baby during the day while they renovated their house.

"To me, looking back, this was what pulled me through – having someone else to look after in a positive way. As I recovered, I also began travelling, visiting friends in Australia and America. I found it was important to grasp closeness with others where I could."

## CARING

- ◆ 6.5 million people in the UK are carers
- ◆ 58% of carers are women and 42% are men
- ◆ The care provided by the UK's carers is valued at £132 billion per year
- ◆ The demands of caring mean that 1 in 5 carers are forced to give up work altogether
- ◆ For help and advice, visit [www.carersuk.org](http://www.carersuk.org)