

## Care of the mind

# Wellbeing for family and friends

While the illness and death of someone close to you are very painful experiences, if you can foster a sense of personal wellbeing it will not only benefit you but will positively affect your entire family.

The situation will be different for everyone and each person will cope in their own way. However, wellbeing relies on a healthy mind, healthy body and healthy relationships.

### Healthy body

When a loved one has a serious illness you can forget to pay attention to your own physical health. Without physical wellbeing you will not have the energy and stamina to contribute to care or be a reliable support for your family. There is a strong connection between physical wellbeing and your ability to cope emotionally during times of stress.

For wellbeing our bodies need regular exercise, a good night's sleep and a balanced nutritious diet.

Although caffeine, alcohol, cigarettes and other substances can help you cope with stress in the short term, in the long run they will only have a detrimental effect on your health.

Stay in regular contact with your GP to monitor your own health and maintain your usual preventative health care appointments e.g. with your dentist, optometrist, physio, massage therapist or chiropractor.

### Healthy mind

It is normal for people in your situation to go through a huge range of intense and changeable emotions from the lows of sadness, anger, resentment, guilt and fear to the highs of joy, gratitude, love, kindness and compassion. It is also normal to feel these highs and lows in quick succession. It is understandable considering the gravity of the situation.

If you feel your level of distress is harmful or unhealthy, this is a sign you may not be coping and need support. This may be when you feel overwhelmed, distressed over a long period of time, when it all feels too much to bear, when you feel helpless or when your emotions stop you from being able to function and do what you need to do.

You may already have been through difficult times in your life and found ways of restoring your mental wellbeing that will help you now.

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Are you focusing on what you can't control or change? Try putting your attention on things in your life that you can control as this will reduce feelings of fear and helplessness. Transform your focus from sadness to appreciation of the time you have with your loved one and gratitude for all they have given you in the time you have had together.

### Healthy relationships

People are by nature interconnected and therefore rely on feelings of belonging to maintain a sense of wellbeing. When you come from a place of kindness by attending to the needs of others your relationship with them will be healthy and you will both experience greater wellbeing.

Having a healthy relationship with your loved one who is dying and with other family members will impact on how well you rally together to support each other.

If there is already tension in any of your relationships then the close and constant contact with each other can intensify existing discord. Some cope with this by withdrawing but this may leave others feeling unsupported and isolated. Even when relationships have previously been harmonious, coming together to care for your loved one can lead to differences of opinion and disagreements. This can be overcome if the needs of the dying person are held as the primary focus by all concerned.

Unhealthy relationships between family members impact negatively on the dying person, preventing the harmonious, peaceful environment they need at this important time in their life. Healthy relationships on the other hand improve their quality of life and peace of mind.

### Finding the support you need

As you can see, your wellbeing is the product of healthy body, mind and relationships and any one of the three can impact on the other two. Even in calm peaceful times in your life it can be difficult to find and maintain this sense of total wellbeing. So it will be quite normal if you find it difficult to do during this uncertain and painful time.

You may be able to achieve the level of wellbeing you seek by yourself or with the support of friends and family. If needed there are professionals who are trained to help you make the changes necessary to restore your sense of wellbeing. If you have had previous experiences of grief, depression or anxiety or if you have found it difficult to cope with life's stressors in the past you may want to consider seeking professional help to prevent complications in your current situation.



Karuna also has experienced people you can talk with on:  
07 3632 8300 or [karuna@karuna.org.au](mailto:karuna@karuna.org.au)

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