



Ambiguous Loss

Alzheimer's

Taking care of someone with dementia can cause stress, overwhelm and a special kind of grief as named by Pauline Boss, PhD. It happens when the person living with dementia is physically here, but psychologically different or absent from who they once were.

Ambiguous Loss Defined

- A loss that is unclear
- Has no resolution
- Has no predictable ending or closure

Boss writes, "When a loved one is lost only partially, the ambiguity coupled with the loss creates a powerful barrier to both coping and grieving. When you are living with an illness or condition that has no cure, hope lies in your perception and ability to change. Therein lies a caregiver's window for hope."



Tips

- Make a decision to be okay with unanswered questions or problems that can't be fixed. They are out of your control.
- As your relationship becomes more one sided, connect with others that can be fully available.
- Pay attention to your sadness as it comes and grieve along the way.
- Feeling fear, anger and guilt are normal. Do not keep these feelings to yourself. Share them with supportive friends, a support group or healthcare professionals.
- Ask for and accept help. Let others show how much they care. Form a psychological family of people you can depend on.
- Know that you are doing the best that you can.
- Live in this moment but allow yourself to think about hopes and dreams for the future.
- Your role as a caregiver changes as the person does. Allow yourself to take care of YOU, while caring for your person.

For further exploration & reflection

- **Read:** Boss, P. (2011). Loving Someone Who Has Dementia. How to Find Hope While Coping with Stress and Grief. San Francisco, CA: Jossey- Bass.