

*Soci t  Alzheimer Society*

# Ambiguous Loss and Grief in Dementia

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29<sup>th</sup> International Conference  
of Alzheimer's Disease International  
San Juan, Puerto Rico  
Sunday, May 4, 2014

# Conflict of Interest Disclosure

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Has no real or apparent  
conflicts of interest to report.



**We tend to associate grief with death**



# This is the *ambiguous* loss and grief of dementia.



# What is ambiguous loss and grief and why is it important?

- Ambiguous loss is the type of loss you feel when a **person with dementia is physically here but not mentally or emotionally present in the same way as before.**
- Yet it is important to remember that **the person with dementia**, regardless of their abilities, **still maintains a core of self that we know can be reached at all stages of the disease.**





If this gentleman were your client, how would your understanding of the concept of ambiguous loss and grief influence your interventions?



# Strategies for Health Care Providers: help carers....

- **Understand** this unique type of grief.
- Learn strategies to continue to **engage** with the person with dementia despite the losses they are experiencing.
- Join an established **dedicated dementia grief support group for carers** – while the person with dementia is still alive.
- Acknowledge the **double load of caregiving and grieving** : through acknowledgement, normalizing, support, providing tools and information.

*continued.....*





# Strategies for Health Care Providers *(continued)*

Tailor helpful coping strategies for each carer by learning about different **grieving styles** (“doers” and “feelers”)

- **Are you an “Instrumental Griever”?** Then you **DO** grief – i.e.. you gather practical information, like to be engaged in activities and projects, actively organize memorials
- **Are you an “Intuitive Griever”?** Then you **FEEL** grief – i.e.. Appreciate active listening, exploring and expressing your feelings, connect and share with others ‘in the same boat’
- **Are you both?**

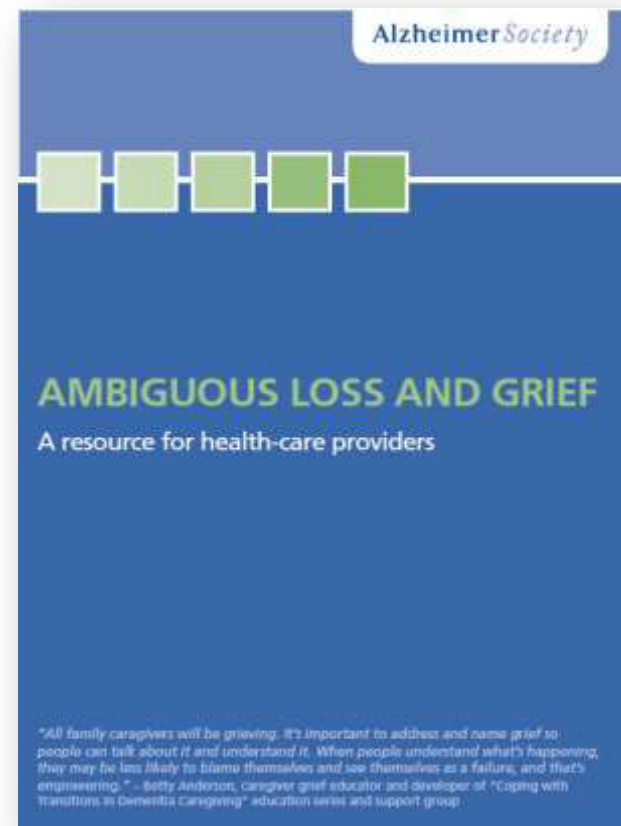
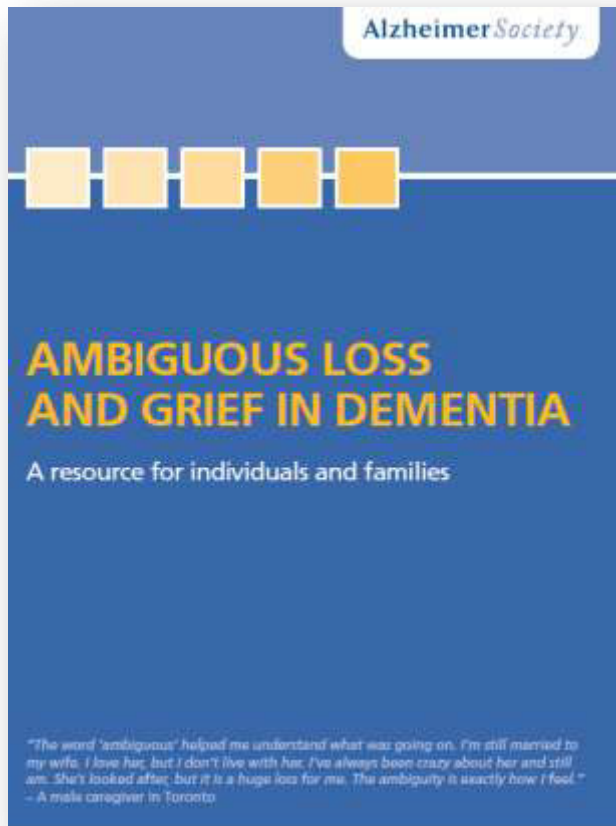


“I was losing my mother and trying to find her. The biggest loss was when I realized I could not bring her back. Physically she was my mother, but mentally she was gone. You have to grieve each one of the losses. Just feel the loss and move on.”

*- Marilyn Preston, a caregiver in Victoria, BC*



## Resources:



English: [www.alzheimer.ca/healthcareprofessionals](http://www.alzheimer.ca/healthcareprofessionals)

French: [www.alzheimer.ca/professionnelsdelasante](http://www.alzheimer.ca/professionnelsdelasante)



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