



### Ambiguous Loss

Caring for someone with a dementia causes stress, overwhelm and a unique kind of grief coined by Pauline Boss, PhD. It occurs when the person with dementia is physically present, but psychologically absent or changed from the past.

#### 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."

## Strategies for managing ambiguous loss

1. Make a conscious decision to be okay with unanswered questions or problems that can't be fixed. They are out of your control.
2. As your relationship becomes more one-sided, connect with others that can be fully present.
3. Acknowledge your sadness as it comes and grieve along the way.
4. 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.
5. Ask for and accept help. Let others show how much they care. Create a psychological family of people you can depend on.
6. Know that you are doing the best that you can.
7. Live in this moment, but allow yourself to hope and dream for a future of possibilities.
8. Your role as a caregiver continues to change as your person does. Give yourself permission 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.
- **Attend:** Finding Meaning While Living With Loss class; view program options and the recorded webinar on: [www.banneralz.org](http://www.banneralz.org)