



**Tuality Healthcare**  
*Building a healthier community.*  
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# info

## mental health

### Tearfulness and Sadness

Sadness is a normal human response in many situations. Feelings of sadness can be triggered by feelings of loss and regret. They can also be a response to the emotions of others. In most cases the feelings of sadness diminishes. An individual who is clinically depressed or who has experienced head trauma (such as injury or stroke) may have a difficult time controlling his/her emotional responses. Since these conditions are often accompanied by a decreased ability to communicate, it may be hard to determine the cause of the fearfulness and the sadness.

Many elders respond to the decline in physical functioning with sadness. They are grieving their loss of independence. As a caregiver, you may see a reoccurrence of his/her sadness as the individual transitions from one stage of a disease process to another. When a person ages, he/she is more frequently faced with loss. Friends and relatives die, children leave home, jobs are lost through retirement, homes are downsized and life-long dreams become unrealistic and unattainable. Sadness is not an infrequent emotion.

As a caregiver here are some keys to managing the tearfulness and sadness.

- Allow time and space for the appropriate expression of sadness and adjustment to loss.
- Remember what may be a minor set back for you can seem devastating to an elder. Don't trivialize the loss and the feelings attached.
- If the tearfulness or sadness begins to severely interfere with his/her ability to meet the demands of daily living

(eating, sleeping, bathing, socializing...), consult the physician.

- Provide an opportunity for the individual to communicate his/her feelings. Set aside time to talk, to through a photo album, listen to old songs. If verbal communication is limited, try providing art materials, or if cognition is limited, he/she may find comfort in a repetitive task such as sanding a board or rocking a doll.
- Encourage physical exercise such as walking.
- Check to make sure that there is no physical pain underlying the crying.
- Prepare him/her in advance for any changes that may be interpreted as loss. (Moving to a residential facility, a relative moving away, 24-hour supervision starting, loss of driver's license...)
- Offer new experiences to help compensate for the loss of old pleasures or look for ways to make old interests still accessible. (Put some plants in a raised container so he/she can continue to garden, look into books on tape or large print books, try an afternoon at the Senior Center, go to the skate park and watch the kids on their skate boards..)
- Provide opportunities for him/her to feel useful and needed. (Ask him/her to help fold the towels before the guests arrive, tear the lettuce for the dinner salad, shine your shoes for an important meeting, stamp the envelopes on mail that needs to go out...)