

Caregiver to Sequel Maker

Transition Playbook



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Jack's Caregiver Coalition is a non-profit improving the way guys think, feel, and act through every phase of their caregiving journey.

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Words For What There are No Words For

Caregiving is hard, *but the loss of your loved one is devastating.*

We don't have all the answers, but this guide may serve as a list of things to think about, or it may be a help to see a familiar thought or two in print.

At Jack's, we have seen many folks go from 24/7 devoted caregiver to grieving widower, and we are in awe of the strength and grace these hurting men and women display when they reach out or arrive at a Sequel Makers Klatch for the first time. This playbook is being pulled together by two of us who have been there.

What is a *Sequel Maker*?

A Sequel Maker is anyone who was a caregiver and subsequently lost their loved one after facing a health crisis.

Even though you probably really, really, really loved the original first movie, it's okay to hope and pray that your sequel will be as good or better than the first. You could be creating *The Empire Strikes Back*, *Maverick*, or *Godfather II* (but hopefully NOT *The Godfather III*). While your sequel may take place in a similar setting, it has a new plot. And although some of the supporting characters are new, you are still the lead role, continuing your story.

**Jack's is here for every phase of your caregiving journey;
Including as you transition into a *Sequel Maker*.**

It is *Overwhelming*

Grief is the process of adjusting to the physical absence of someone with whom you continue to have a psychological or spiritual relationship. Put simply, even though they are gone, you still love them and miss them, because it still feels like they should be there.

It is Different for *Everyone*

People deal with grief in different ways, which is good, because no two people and no two relationships are alike. For a long time, the grief process was described in stages. This gave many people the mistaken idea that after a loss they would experience all of these "stages" in sequential order.

Very few people experience grief this way. It is more common to oscillate back and forth between the various stages, repeating some, skipping others and going round again sometimes.

The length of time it takes a person to grieve varies from one circumstance to the next.

It is *Lonely*

Sometimes this overwhelming and powerful grief can seem to have no end. Grief this extensive is called "complicated grief." Complicated grief affects between 10% to 20% of people after a loss and it can make daily activities incredibly difficult. This is when it is essential to get help from a therapist who specializes in grief.

There are no words, but we're going to give it a shot.

Don't feel guilty about grieving the way you grieve.

Your experience is unique and your own. You will not grieve on anyone's timeline, but the natural one that you experience for yourself. Well-meaning armchair critics without a frame of reference may not be the best source of guidance and advice at this time. Follow your instincts about who to surround yourself with and be with people who lift you up without making you feel like you are "doing it wrong."

Find and Utilize Resources that Can Help

You've just been through something awful—not just the loss of your loved one, but the tough stuff that came beforehand. It is important that you have support from people who have been there, such as through a grief group or Sequel Makers. It is also a good idea to seek counsel from a therapist who specializes in grief and loss to help you sort through what has happened and the things you are experiencing now, as a result.

What's Worse than the Loss of a Partner?

Nothing.

Diversify

It is important to have support in all areas of your life: Family, Friends, Work, Leisure, etc. Read books on grief and loss. Attend support groups. Find a therapist that you "click" with. Try all these things. Some will work and some won't. Stick with the ones that work for you!

The Well Will Run Dry

Couple-friends, acquaintances, co-workers, and even relatives may distance themselves from this painful experience. Sometimes support ends shortly after your loss. You have a lot on your plate and these now one-sided relationships are exhausting to try to maintain on your own. You have permission to let them go.

Avoid Making Any Major Life Decisions in the Year Following Your Loss

You have probably heard this before. The NIH and the Mayo Clinic advise not making any major life decisions while actively grieving the death of a loved one. Most bereavement professionals recommend waiting a year before making any major life decisions. As you probably already know, you are being tasked with many choices and decisions right now. Small picture choices are enough.

Grief is Weird

One day you might feel “okay.” In fact, it might seem like you’ve gone for quite some time feeling “okay.” Then out of the blue, something (or nothing at all) happens and you are overcome with grief, as if the loss occurred yesterday. That’s because your heart doesn’t follow a timeline. When these days happen, it is okay to feel the feelings. They are part of the healing process.

How to Reach Out

Both authors felt like they needed to make a case for needed help before they would reach out to get it. In fact, they didn’t need to do so. Health care professionals understand the nuances of loss and grief and want to give you the support and resources you need. The first step is to reach out to the doctor you see most often.

We’ve Tested the Waters

Jack’s isn’t an island. We thrive because of our partnerships with other organizations in the community and we would love to share with you the resources and support groups that they have to offer our members. Our staff and volunteers themselves have received services from these community partners.

Jack-to-Jack Coaching Isn’t Over

Just like you received coaching as a caregiver in our Jack-to-Jack program, we have Jack-to-Jack coaching for Sequel Makers from people who are Sequel Makers themselves. We also have an online platform with a community dedicated to Sequel Makers.