

Kowhai Programme

Support for patients, families & carers

The emotional rollercoaster

Normally life is full of ups and downs, but when facing a crisis in our lives such as receiving a diagnosis of a terminal illness, these ups and downs can be much more extreme. This rollercoaster of emotions can be very similar experience for both the 'patient' as well as for their 'carers'.

What kind of things can we expect to find on the emotional rollercoaster?

Physical:

- Dealing with limitations:
 - Mobility (can't walk far, need a frame or wheelchair, issues with acceptance of this)
 - Not being able to drive
 - Change in your previous roles (such as having to stop work (and therefore financial loss), difficulties doing things such as gardening, hobbies, sports, caring for others)
- Dealing with changes with disease progression/symptoms
- Dealing with changes to your intimacy/sexual relationships
- Dealing with side effects of medications (sleeping more or less, constipation, nausea)
- Dealing with side effects of treatments (chemotherapy, radiotherapy)
- Having to consider changes of accommodation (having to move to long term care)

Spiritual:

- Losses or reconnection to sources of strength such as:
 - Your faith or culture (being able to go to church going to the Marae)
 - Nature (being able to go outdoors/to important places)
 - Being able to do meaningful activities (such as your hobbies/sports)
 - Spending time with meaningful people (such as your family/friends)
- Loss of hope
- Loss of meaning (what am I leaving?)

Family/Whānau:

- Changes to relationships (with our partners, children, friends)
- Changes to planning or being able to participate at important family events (weddings, birthdays, anniversaries)
- Change of role within the family (partner to care-giver, inability to do what you did within your family)

Mind:

- Frustration/anger (around changes in the body, limitations, symptoms)
- Anxiety (what's next)
- Waiting (for appointments, treatments, outcomes of results)
- Sadness
- Feelings of guilt/being a burden

Our emotional scales:

When life is on an even keel, we can general cope with life's ups and downs. When we face a life crisis and we have situations that are depleting our ability to cope our scale can tip over.

Signs that I am stressed:

PHYSICAL:

Headaches
Changes to sleep patterns
Changes to appetite

SPIRITUAL:

Loss of hope
Inability to utilise the things that give me strength

FAMILY/WHĀNAU:

Withdrawing or increased dependence
Lashing out
Unrealistic expectations on others/yourself

MIND:

Feelings of guilt/being a burden
Overwhelming anxiety/panic attacks
Depression

My coping resources:

PHYSICAL:

Enjoying what I still can do
Structuring your day
Pacing activities

SPIRITUAL:

Getting out into nature
Connecting with your faith
Doing things that give you joy

FAMILY/WHĀNAU:

Allowing/asking for help
Set limits on visitors/phone calls
Spend time on your own

MIND:

Adjusting expectations on self/others
Having something to look forward too no matter how small
Distraction

My signs of stress:

What helps me to cope?

Coping styles:

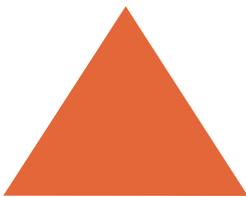
In times of crisis, it is important to consider that people have three types of coping styles to manage the situation they are facing. These are:

- Moving towards (seeking out information and wanting to talk about it)
- Moving away (needing space – don't want to think or talk about it right now)
- Moving against (I am going to seek other options on this)

In the heat of crisis we all have a preferred go to position of one of the above styles that does not tend to change. There is no right or wrong style. They all help us to manage the situation. When our stress is lower we move between these coping styles.

Frequently in families we have different coping styles to manage in a crisis, this is we can strike difficulties when these clash.

Moving Towards



Moving Against

Moving Away

What about when I am not coping?

If you experience any of the below, this is when you need to seek help:

- When you can no longer carry out the ordinary tasks of everyday life
- You experience suicidal thoughts or thoughts of harming yourself
- You are reliant on alcohol or other drugs to get you through the day
- Withdrawing from people you love
- If you are worried about yourself

Seek help from a professional person e.g. your GP. Tell someone who can listen and get help for you. Accept that you cannot do this alone.

Remember: Human beings need each other and it is okay to ask for help

If you would like to have further assistance to assist you with managing your stress and have a referral to one of our counsellors, please contact the Otago Community Hospice ph 0800 473 6005