

Caregiver's Letter to a Friend

Adapted from <https://thecaregivernetwork.ca/letter-family-friends/> October 4, 2016 by Zachary White

As caregivers, we can sometimes lose ourselves in caregiving. We are so immersed in the work, stress and grief of the role that we feel a widening distance between ourselves and our most valued friends. It is often difficult to express how we are feeling and that contrary to all the signals provided, we really DO want to maintain the friendship. This letter may help you find the words to ask for your friend's patience as you find your way back to yourself. It's a letter to explain the inexplicable, or what sometimes happens to us when we care for someone who isn't getting better ...

To my friend,

I've told you what is happening but what you don't know is what is happening to me. I'm not even sure what is happening to me. I'm trying to make sense of it all, taking it in and trying to find the words that will be understandable. Coherence takes time – it's not something I can do myself – so I will need you. Right now, I'm thinking through how what I'm experiencing might sound like to you if I tried to explain it. I desperately want you to understand but I also don't want to scare you. Please don't interpret my silence as a lack of care. I care about you and that's why I'm trying so hard. Even though the harder I try to put my experience into words, the more jumbled it all seems. What I'm seeing and experiencing and feeling – it's so raw and all over the place that it will take me time to translate it in a way that I can share. Please be patient with me. Please.

I'm sorry we're drifting apart, I really am. I'm not picking up my phone or answering my messages these days. Half the time, I feel like I'm too busy. The other half of the time, I see when you've called but I don't have the energy to even listen to a voicemail message. It's not that I don't want to. It's just that I feel like I can't right now. I'm here, but I may not even answer the door if you come by. It's not that I don't want to. You want to help and for that, I am deeply grateful but being near illness is changing me. I want to be called. I want you to text. I want you to want to come by – even though when you do – I may not answer.

I'm avoiding not just you right now – it's everyone. Please don't take it personally. I get anxious these days. Not about the big stuff – I see that up close and personal all the time. It's the little stuff that's tripping me up. I'm embarrassed to admit but I get nervous when someone asks me something as simple as, "How are you doing?" Yesterday, a stranger asked me that question as I was waiting in line at the pharmacy. It was as if I couldn't speak. I don't know how to answer that question without tearing up and feeling like I tearing apart. I wish I could give you a clean and neat response when you ask me how I'm doing but nothing right now is clean and neat.

Because I care about you, I can't simply allow myself to say, "I'm okay" or "I'm doing fine." I'm not there yet and right now, it feels like I'll never be there so I'm sparing you and me the pain of lying.

I don't worry about what others seem to care about. The nightly news. Or the election. Or the Kardashians. I want to care about what everyone else cares about, but I don't. Is it because I'm all cared out at the end of each day? I used to look forward to so much. But now, I've completely lost perspective. Not in the way most people lose perspective. I used to get nervous about the silliest of things. Talking to new people. Meeting new people. Getting up in front of people to talk about something. Now, I don't know what I get nervous about. Everything is blurring together and I am looking at a horizon I can't explain to you yet. I wish I could but I have a filter that doesn't allow me to see what you see anymore. I wish I could forget for one moment. Fun. Get togethers. A dinner out. A movie. Thank you for the invitations but I can't forget right now. It's not that I don't want to – it's just that I'm focused on that horizon, beyond the everyday. You see the grandeur of everyday life and get consumed in it. I look at everyday life and see something beyond it. I know I'm missing more than I see. And you're part of what I'm missing.

I want you to be near me. I want to hear your voice. Please don't misunderstand me. I'm here but I'm gone. I may be near you but I can't listen to you the way I once did. You may hear me and think I sound the same, but I don't. I didn't choose this way of looking at things, it feels like it chose me. I just wanted you to know what's going through my mind. I just wanted to explain myself without making everything so awkward. I wish I could have told you this in person – not an apology – just a way to explain. Soon enough, I hope to reach out and smile and give you a hug. Right now, so much is working its way through me. But thank you for being near me so when I'm ready, you'll be there, knowing I will need you to help begin making sense of myself again.

Love,

*You viewed this article on the Caregivers Nova Scotia website www.CaregiversNS.org. For more information, contact us toll-free at 1.877.488.7338.