

Activity

Read the following brief case study and then reflect on the questions below.

Frances' husband Jonathan was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease at the age of 53. He was a community care worker and his problems first came to light when he forgot visits or lost his way and called into the office again and again for directions. Over time Frances became unable to care for Jonathan, look after her two teenage children and, importantly, continue to work. Jonathan was admitted to a dementia assessment unit attached to a local social services care home. He deteriorated rapidly and was soon unable to recognise Frances or the children and would sit with his face screwed up and eyes closed, rarely speaking. Frances felt a huge sense of guilt that she was unable to continue caring for him and felt his behaviour was due to her 'abandonment' of him. She was anxious and tearful during visits and felt he was no longer 'Jonathan'. Even more distressing was her feeling that she had contributed to his rapid decline and that he was 'dead yet alive'.

Having read this section on carers and end of life care in dementia, think about the following questions:

1. Why might Frances be feeling guilt over Jonathan's move into a care home?
2. How might the children be feeling?
3. As a care home worker, how might you be able to help Frances understand her feelings?
4. How can you help Frances to feel that she can still communicate with Jonathan? (You may want to refer to the section on communication also to help you with this question)

For more about the particular issues faced by younger people with dementia and their families, see the section on 'Younger people with dementia'.