

Bereavement Support For Adult Children

Facing the Death of a Parent

The mental picture most have of an "orphaned child" is a sad-faced youngster trying to make sense of a scary world. But what about facing the death of a parent when you are no longer a "youngster?" Even grownups face the hard task of saying goodbye to a parent.

As adult children, we bear a unique perspective on grief that is different from that of a surviving spouse. While the death of a spouse is a huge loss, it is a very different loss from the grief growing out of a parent's death.

Sometimes, early grief is muted by utter exhaustion, especially if you cared for your parent through an illness. Often, grief is magnified by the realization that you now bear an inordinate responsibility for a surviving parent or as the new leader of "the clan."

With the death of a biological parent, we don't remember a time prior to being his or her child; this relationship is older than any other we have and there is no "history" apart from this individual. If, on the other hand, you came to know your parent later in life, grief can be intensified by sadness about lost years and opportunities. And when you must say goodbye to a "parent by choice," one who married your biological parent, for example, or an adoptive parent, that loss is also unique and significant. So much of what we know about the world—for good and for bad—came to us first from our parents.

Not all memories from our families, however, are pleasant. Grief is an odd experience, in that we often grieve the relationship we did not have as much as all we lost. When the relationship with your parent was pocked by substance addiction or abuse, for example, saying goodbye can be filled with mixed feelings. It's quite normal to feel little sadness over saying goodbye to some parts of the relationship, even while grieving the opportunities missed for meaningful connection.

Finding Support

Do not try to get through grief on your own. Lean on the support offered by friends, colleagues and other supportive people. Allow them to help you; accept the offer of a meal or a task with gratitude.

While connecting with others is vital, remember that some members of your family may not be able to provide this emotional support. Remember that every individual's relationship with a parent is unique, and each person's grief will reflect those differences. Joining a bereavement support group or [talking with a counselor](#) can be especially helpful.

Written Resources

In addition, you might find help in the following books, written especially about, by and for people dealing with the death of a parent:

- [Grieving the Death of Your Mother](#) by Harold Ivan Smith
- [On Grieving the Death of a Father](#) by Harold Ivan Smith
- [When Parents Die: Learning to Live with the Loss of a Parent](#) by Rebecca Abrams
- [Midlife Orphan](#) by Jane Brooks
- [When Parents Die: A Guide for Adults](#) by Edward Myers
- [Nobody's Child Anymore](#) by Barbara Bartocci