

Grief After a Parent Dies

**You're not alone.
We're here to listen.**
There is no timeline for grief. Knowing there are supports and resources available can give hope as you move through your grief.

Types of Grief

Normative (Typical) Grief: Emotional, physical, cognitive, behavioural, social, and spiritual responses experienced after a death or loss. Grief responses are initially intense, but the intensity does subside over time.

Complex Grief: When you have been experiencing **intense feelings of grief** for **longer than 6 months** after the death of your loved one; **or** are experiencing extreme difficulties with day-to-day functioning, which negatively impacts your health and/or safety.

Anticipatory Grief: Grieving your loss before your parent's death occurred (i.e. when a parent has a terminal illness, accessed medical assistance in dying (MAiD) etc).

Ambiguous Grief: This form of grief can be experienced before and after a death.

Ambiguous grief with no death: When your parent no longer appears or presents as the person you know them to be (i.e. a parent has a neurological disorder, or they are struggling with a substance use disorder).

Ambiguous grief after death: When your parent's death has occurred, but the information surrounding their death is limited, or the majority of information remains unknown.

Disenfranchised Grief: When judgment from the larger society occurs, or others do not acknowledge your grief. Grief is not recognized or validated by others.

- Death carries societal stigma (i.e. suicide, overdose, or non-death losses).
- A person's grief responses and mourning practices stray away from perceived norms (i.e. the duration of intense feelings is lengthy). The relationship with the deceased is judged or seen as insignificant (strained or estranged relationship).

Everyone experiences grief differently. Your grief is impacted by internal and external factors as well as the personal coping skills you have cultivated throughout your life.

Factors that Impact Grief

- Age of the parent who has died and your age
- Circumstances surrounding your parent's death
- The nature of the relationship you had with your parent
- Number of losses you have already experienced



Strategies to Support Healthy Grieving and Mourning (A. Wolfelt, 2002)

- Feelings of unfinished business may occur. Take time to work through “if only” or “should have” statements, while reminding yourself of the time spent, words said, or things done together. You may not resolve these statements fully, but you will begin your work towards acceptance.
- No grief is the same, and the relationship with your deceased parent was unique to you. Talk openly about your grief with others, practice non-judgmental listening, and give yourself time to heal.
- If you were a caregiver to your parent who died, give yourself time to rest, recuperate and reestablish healthy routines.
- Be okay with saying “no”, when necessary. Be kind to yourself, recognize your own needs and the importance of setting boundaries.
- Take time to sort through your parent’s belongings (if you can). This can become complicated when other grievers are also involved. Discuss thoughts, feelings, and concerns with one another. It is important that each griever’s voice is heard and not overpowered.
- Make use of linking objects. Linking objects provide a level of support and comfort during mourning. They are items that have sentimental value to the bereaved, (i.e. clothing, jewelry, photo, card, tool, a type of food, a specific song, etc).
- Maintain attachments with your parent who died. Share memories and talk about them, using their name or role they held in your life (mom/dad). Talk to your loved one: **imagine what advice they would give when making decisions or in times of stress, also have them be a part of holidays and special celebrations.**

Doka, K. J. (2016). When your spouse dies. In *Grief is a journey: finding your path through loss* (pp. 150–169). essay, Atria Books.

Wolfelt, A. (2002). *Healing the adult child's grieving heart: 100 practical ideas after your child dies*. Companion Press.

Wolfelt, A. D. (2016, December 15). *Helping Yourself When a Parent Dies*. Center for Loss & Life Transition. <https://www.centerforloss.com/>

Regardless if your parent’s death was sudden or expected, whether your relationship was close or strained, or how long you had to prepare for this emotionally taxing time, the death of a parent is life-changing.

It is important to remember that grief is a natural response to the death of a loved one, and your journey through grief will occur at a pace that is right for you.



We’re a part of your story.