

# Adult Parental Loss

As we grow to adulthood, we come to realize that death is a natural part of life. Most of us understand that with the death of a loved one comes pain and suffering. Parents usually die before their children. However, when a mother or father is killed suddenly and violently, grief reactions of their adult children can be intense, complicated and long-lasting. No amount of expectation or anticipation can prepare us for the pain of such a tragedy.

If your parent was killed in a drunk driving crash, you may feel angrier than you have ever felt and sadder than you thought possible. You may have scary thoughts and you may do strange things. You may be afraid you are “going crazy.” Grieving the death of your mother or father can feel so overwhelming that you may question your own sanity.

## *The bond between parent and child*

To work toward an understanding of your parent’s death, it is useful to consider the importance of the relationship between a parent and child. Without a doubt, parents play important roles in our lives that we might not realize in the moment. They watch us grow and are witnesses to our lives.

Your mother or father may have been the only person aside from you to remember particular events, occasions or gatherings. As a child and even as an adult, you may have enjoyed hour upon hour in your parent’s home. Today, the house may be gone, along with the mother or father who so diligently cared for family traditions and rituals within its walls.

Often parents act as a buffer between siblings or family members. If a mother or father was the “glue” of the family, relationships among remaining members may fall apart. At the very least, the nature of these relationships is sure to change. People may have to get to know one another and interact like never before.

Some victims/survivors experience the added stress of assuming the vacated roles of their parents. If your mother or father was the primary caregiver of a younger sibling or elderly relative, you may be concerned about who will assume the role in their absence. It may never have occurred to you that you would face such a responsibility.

## *A Unique Grief*

We tend to view our parents as immortal. We believe that when our parents die, their deaths will be peaceful and pleasant. If your parent was killed, no matter how old he or she was, you may deeply regret that their death was an undignified one. Although some may say, “He lived a good life,” it may feel wrong that you could not say, “Thank you for all you have done for me,” or, “Goodbye.”

For some, however, feelings of guilt surface when a parent dies, especially when the relationship was strained prior to the crash. Feelings of relief, freedom or ambivalence are not uncommon and are normal reactions. In fact, you may experience a lot of different emotions that vary in intensity. Feelings such as anger, sadness, guilt and confusion are all a part of the grieving process and may come and go.



## **There are things that you can do that might be helpful when coping with the death of a parent:**

Surround yourself with supportive people.

Avoid people who are not helpful.

Spend time with family and friends who are caring listeners.

Seek the support of others who have experienced a similar loss.

Create a journal to express your thoughts and emotions.

Make a memorial or create a ritual that reminds you of your parent and honors their legacy.

Don't feel pressured to do things others think you should do.

Exercise, eat healthy food and get plenty of rest to give yourself energy.

Create an art project that focuses on your memories of your loved one.

Focus on making small life changes as opposed to major life decisions.

Seek a support group or professional counseling.

If possible, keep photos and keepsakes around; as hard as it may be to look now, over time these visual reminders may become treasured memories.

Grief is not an event but a process of experiencing the physical, emotional, mental, social, and spiritual effects of a death or other loss. Grief reactions are common to most people although each person grieves in their own way and in their own time.

## *Help in healing*

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Friends and even some family members may not be able to support you while you grieve. Many people who attempt to comfort victims/survivors, including some professionals, do not understand that intense and long-lasting grief is appropriate for victims of drunk driving crashes. You may hear things like, “You’ll be okay,” or “It’s time to move on,” or even something like, “They’ve had a good, long life.” In these circumstances people aren’t trying to hurt you, but they are unaware of how these statements might affect you.

When someone approaches you with that type of a remark, if you are comfortable sharing, express how you are feeling and what you are thinking. You may be able to teach them the value of listening.

You may be approached at work as if you are supposed to go back to a “life as normal” routine. You might want to speak with your supervisor and explain that sometimes you may need to take a walk during the middle of the day, that it’s normal what you are going through and that the intensity of your grief will change over time.

Remember, grieving doesn’t mean that you have to forget. Grief is an experience that is different for everyone, but you don’t have to be alone. Healing takes time and after you have suffered the loss of a parent, you may be forever changed. Take the time to take care of yourself and remember your loved one.

