

Grief After the Loss of a Parent When a lifelong relationship changes through death

A gentle guide for understanding and support

Losing a parent can affect us at any age. Alongside missing the person, we may lose a link to childhood, family history, identity and the feeling that somebody from our earliest life is still there. The relationship does not need to have been uncomplicated for the grief to be real.

Understanding this kind of grief

- Adult children can feel pressure to 'cope' because they are grown up. Age does not remove attachment.
- If the relationship was difficult, grief may include sadness for what happened and grief for what you never received.
- Family roles can shift after a parent's death. Siblings may grieve very differently and old family dynamics can reappear.
- Milestones such as birthdays, weddings, becoming a parent or needing advice can create fresh layers of grief.

A gentle reminder

You do not have to prove that your grief is serious enough to deserve care. Loss is personal. What matters is the impact it has on you.

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Therapy & support that may help

Therapy is not about taking grief away or making you forget. At its best, it gives you a safe relationship in which the loss can be spoken about, understood and carried with less isolation.

Person-centred counselling - offers room for both loving and difficult memories.

Bereavement counselling - focused support around the death and adjustment.

Family therapy - can help when the loss changes sibling or family relationships.

Trauma-informed therapy - may help if the death or earlier family experiences were traumatic.

You do not have to start therapy simply because you are grieving. Some people are supported well by family, friends, community, reading or peer support. Others value professional help. Cruse Bereavement Support also offers bereavement information, helpline support, groups and one-to-one support in the UK.

When to reach for more help

Consider speaking with your GP or a qualified mental-health professional if grief is making everyday life feel persistently unmanageable, you are experiencing severe or worsening distress, trauma symptoms are dominating daily life, or you are worried about your safety. If you feel you may act on thoughts of harming yourself, seek urgent help through emergency services or a crisis service.

A few things that can help between difficult waves

- Reduce expectations on the hardest days. Grief uses physical as well as emotional energy.
- Keep basic needs visible: fluids, simple food, medication, sleep routines and fresh air where possible.
- Choose one or two safe people you can be honest with rather than feeling you must explain yourself to everyone.
- Create a small ritual of remembrance or acknowledgement if that feels right for you.
- Notice triggers and anniversaries in advance and plan extra gentleness around them.
- Allow moments of laughter, interest or rest without treating them as betrayal.

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Books I would recommend exploring

Books cannot tell you how you should grieve, but sometimes another person's words help us recognise something we have not yet been able to say ourselves.

When Parents Die

Rebecca Abrams

Explores the impact of parental death in adult life.

The Orphaned Adult

Alexander Levy

Looks at identity and emotional change after the death of parents.

Grief Works

Julia Samuel

Compassionate stories and reflections on many forms of bereavement.

A reflection to take with you

What did my parent represent in my life, and what feels different about who I am now they are no longer here?

From me to you

Please be gentle with yourself. Grief is not a test you pass, a set of stages you complete, or evidence that you are failing to cope. Sometimes the most helpful thing we can do is make a little more room for what is already there. You are allowed to take this one day - or one hour - at a time.

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