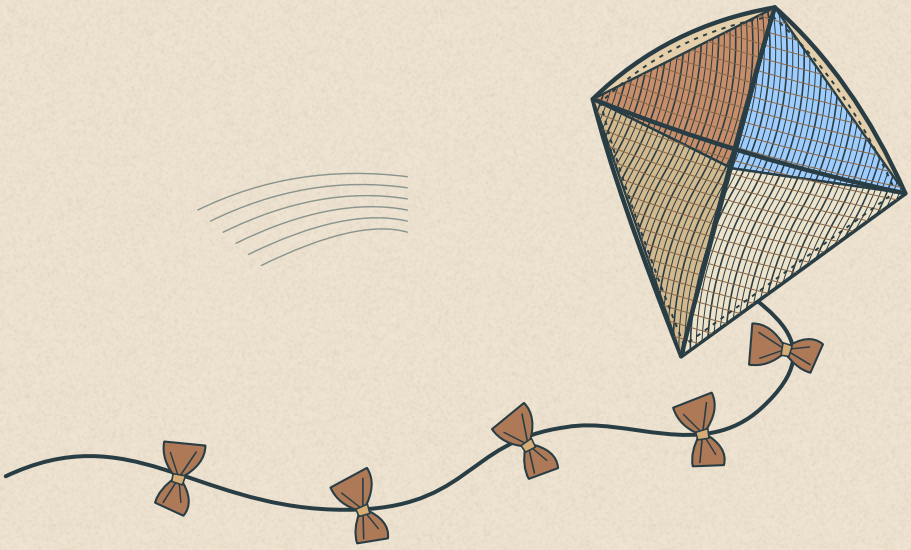
When Your Parent Dies

A little guide for children ages 12 and under, for the days that feel different.



When your parent dies, a lot of things can change. You might miss them. You might have questions. You might want to play or be quiet.

You can read this guide a little at a time, on your own or with a grown-up you trust. You can skip parts and ask questions whenever you want.

What does it mean when someone dies?



When someone dies, their body stops working. They cannot breathe, think or feel pain anymore. They cannot come back to life.

Families might have different beliefs about what happens after someone dies. You can ask a grown-up you trust about what your family believes.

Nothing you thought, wished or felt made your parent die. You don't have to work out why it happened on your own. It's okay to ask questions, even the same question more than once.

Feelings can change

You might feel sad, mad, worried or confused. You might feel okay. Sometimes you might not know what you feel.

You can cry, talk, draw, play or be quiet. You don't have to do these things in any special order.

Who can help me?

There might be new people doing things that your parent used to do. You can ask a grown-up:

- Who will take me to school?
- Who will be there when I get home?
- Who can I talk to when I have a hard day?

If you are worried about who will take care of you, tell a grown-up you trust. You deserve help and answers.

At school and with friends

It might feel strange to go to school or see your friends. You might want to talk about your parent or play.

You could ask a teacher to help you find a quiet place if you need a break. If someone asks you a question you don't want to answer, you can say, “I don't want to talk about that right now.”

A safe grown-up can help if someone is being unkind or you feel unsafe.

It is okay to have fun

You can play games, make things, run around, watch something funny or spend time with friends. You can have fun and still miss your parent.

Pick something small that sounds fun today. You can ask someone to do it with you.

Remembering, if you want to

If you want, you could draw a picture, look at a photo, listen to a song or ask someone to tell you a story about your parent.

You can stop whenever you want. You don't have to make or share anything.

My small plan for today



Choose any of these ideas, or skip them:

- Something I would like to do today.
- Someone I can ask to help me.
- A question I want to ask a grown-up.

You can think about your answers, draw them or talk with a trusted grown-up. You don't have to write anything down or send it to anyone.

When I need more help

If your feelings are hard to manage, or if you feel hurt, scared or unsafe, tell a grown-up you trust right away. If they don't help, tell another safe grown-up. You can ask them to help you find someone trained to help children after a death.

If you or someone else is in immediate danger, ask a safe adult for help and call the local emergency number (911 in the United States) if you can.

More things to explore with a grown-up

Dougy Center: Resources for kids
https://www.dougy.org/grief-support-resources/kids

This Is Why: Resources
https://www.thisiswhy.life/resources

For the grown-ups reading along: Choose short passages that match the child's understanding. With babies and very young children, focus on familiar care, comfort, routines and simple words over time; do not expect them to read or understand the whole guide. HealthyChildren.org (American Academy of Pediatrics): how children understand death offers additional age-specific guidance. If a child needs immediate emotional or crisis support in the U.S., call or text 988 or visit 988 Lifeline. For guidance on additional support, see NACG.

Content note: Bryan's story describes a parent's violent death. Please read it first and decide whether to share it with your child. Read Bryan's story.
https://www.thisiswhy.life/our-stories/introduction

Web addresses for links in the text

HealthyChildren.org (American Academy of Pediatrics): how children understand death: https://www.healthychildren.org/English/healthy-living/emotional-wellness/Building-Resilience/Pages/How-Children-Understand-Death-What-You-Should-Say.aspx

988 Lifeline: https://988lifeline.org/get-help/

NACG: https://nacg.org/additional-support/

About This Is Why

This Is Why is a grief support platform and community for people who lost a parent during childhood or adolescence. Our founder, Bryan Jung, lost his dad as a child.

Explore This Is Why's resources.
https://www.thisiswhy.life/resources

This guide offers general information, not therapy or crisis care.

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