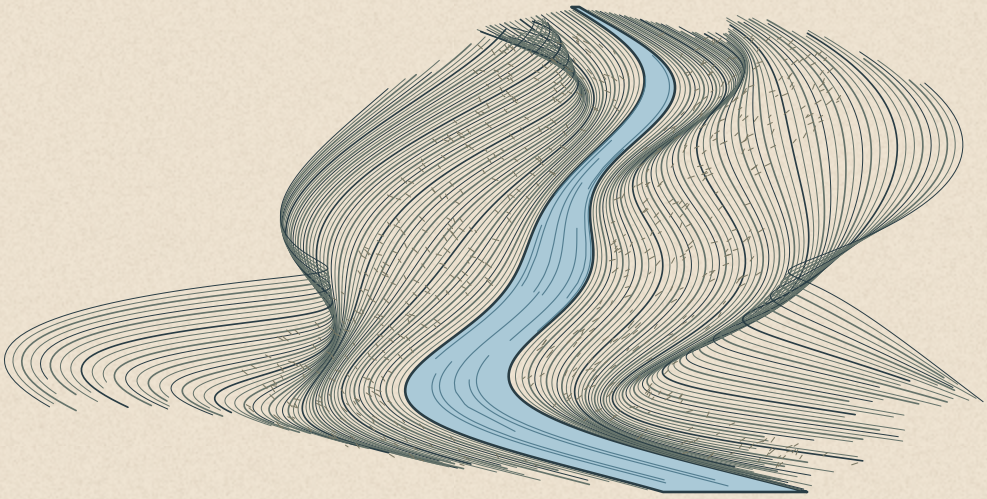
When Your Parent Dies: For the Days Ahead

A guide for ages 13–19 navigating life after the death of a parent.



If your parent died, you might find yourself trying to get through a day that looks ordinary to everyone else. School, college or work might carry on as usual. Your friends still have plans. But things at home might feel different.

You don't have to figure out everything today. Read a little, come back later, or share this guide with an adult you trust.

Give yourself room



You might miss your parent, feel angry, feel relieved, have questions, or not know what you feel. Your relationship with them might have been complicated. You don't owe anyone a particular reaction.

There might be moments when grief feels close and times when you barely think about it. A good day does not erase your relationship with your parent.

Going back to school, college or work

It can be hard to concentrate when so much has changed. If your day feels like too much, a teacher, school or campus counselor, supervisor or another person you trust might be able to help you work out what would make it more manageable.

You might ask for somewhere quiet to go, extra time on an assignment, flexibility with a shift, or a plan for what to do if an activity brings up difficult feelings. You can ask for help without explaining every detail to everyone.

> Try: “I want to be here, but today is hard. Can we make a plan for what to do if I need a break?”

Friends, questions and privacy

Some friends might not know what to say. You might want someone to talk with, or you might just want to hang out and be included in the usual things.

You get to choose how much of your experience you share with friends. You could say:

- “I'd rather not talk about it right now.”
- “Can you still invite me, even if I sometimes say no?”
- “Can we just do something normal today?”

If someone shares things about your family that you didn't want shared, ask a trusted adult for help.

You still get to be a teenager



After a parent dies, jobs and responsibilities at home can change. Helping out can matter to you, but you still need time for your own plans, rest, friends and things you enjoy.

If you're being asked to do more than you can manage, talk with a trusted adult about what could be shared or changed.

Keep the things you enjoy

Sports, music, games, friends and laughing at something funny can still be part of your life. Having fun does not mean you have forgotten your parent.

Try choosing one small thing you'd like to do today. It can be unrelated to grief.

Remembering your parent, in your own way

A birthday, holiday, game or graduation might bring up feelings you did not expect. You might want to remember your parent through a song, photo, food they liked, quiet moment or family tradition. You might not want to do any of those things. It's your choice.

If a date is coming up that feels difficult, ask someone you trust to help you make a plan. You can change your mind.

Find someone you can turn to

Think of one person who listens and helps you feel safe: a caregiver, relative, teacher, coach, school or campus counselor, or another adult you trust. If the first person doesn't help, try another.

> Try: “I don't need you to fix everything. I need someone to listen and help me work out what to do next.”

If sleep, school, work, eating or everyday life are becoming difficult to manage, you can reach out to a qualified grief or mental-health professional. If you need help finding one, ask an adult you trust.

If you need help right now

If you feel unsafe or worry that you might hurt yourself or someone else, tell a trusted adult right away. In the United States, you can call or text 988, or use 988 Lifeline. For immediate danger or a medical emergency, call 911. Outside the U.S., use local emergency or crisis services.

More places to start

Dougy Center: Resources for teens (13–18)
https://www.dougy.org/grief-support-resources/teens

Dougy Center: Resources for young adults (including age 19)
https://www.dougy.org/grief-support-resources/young-adults

National Alliance for Children's Grief: Finding additional support — a trusted adult can help you explore this resource.
https://nacg.org/additional-support/

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

Web addresses for links in the text

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

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.

Content note: Bryan’s story describes a parent’s violent death. Read Bryan’s story.
https://www.thisiswhy.life/our-stories/introduction

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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