

Helping Yourself As You Cope with the Loss of a Parent

No matter what age our parents live to, we may feel that we wanted more time with them and that it was just too soon for them to die. Knowing and recognizing that we will outlive our parents does not diminish the sense of loss we experiences when it actually happens.

Coping with the loss of a parent means that we must learn to live without a person who has always been there for us, someone we have known our entire life. Your parent knew you from the very beginning, carried knowledge of your past, and shared much of your life. The significance of that loss cannot be overemphasized.

Here are some suggestions for coping with the loss of a parent.

Allow yourself to grieve. During your time of grief, you may experience a wide range of emotions, which can leave you feeling unsettled. You may also experience intense feelings and be unsure of how to handle them. All these emotions are normal and very much a part of the grieving process.

Give yourself time. Remember that you will grieve not only in your own way but also in your own time, so it is important to be patient with yourself. Try to avoid feeling that you need to “get over” your feelings or “move on”— you need time to think about the past and cherish your memories.

Pay attention to your health. Grief often leaves people feeling physically and emotionally exhausted. It makes sense to eat regularly and rest whenever you need to. A visit to your family doctor is also a good idea, as he or she can assist you in understanding the symptoms of grief. When you’re not feeling like yourself, reassurance from a doctor you trust can be very comforting.

Reach out to supportive people. Be specific about the kind of help you need. Family members, friends, neighbors, people in your community, people at your place of worship, and coworkers can all be supportive in different ways. Some individuals may be open to listening to you reminisce about your parent, while others might be more helpful with practical tasks. Consider getting the support from a professional grief counselor or oncology social worker. These individuals are trained to help you understand your feelings and find additional ways to cope. Or, look into support groups, which allow you to connect with other people who are coping with the loss of a parent.



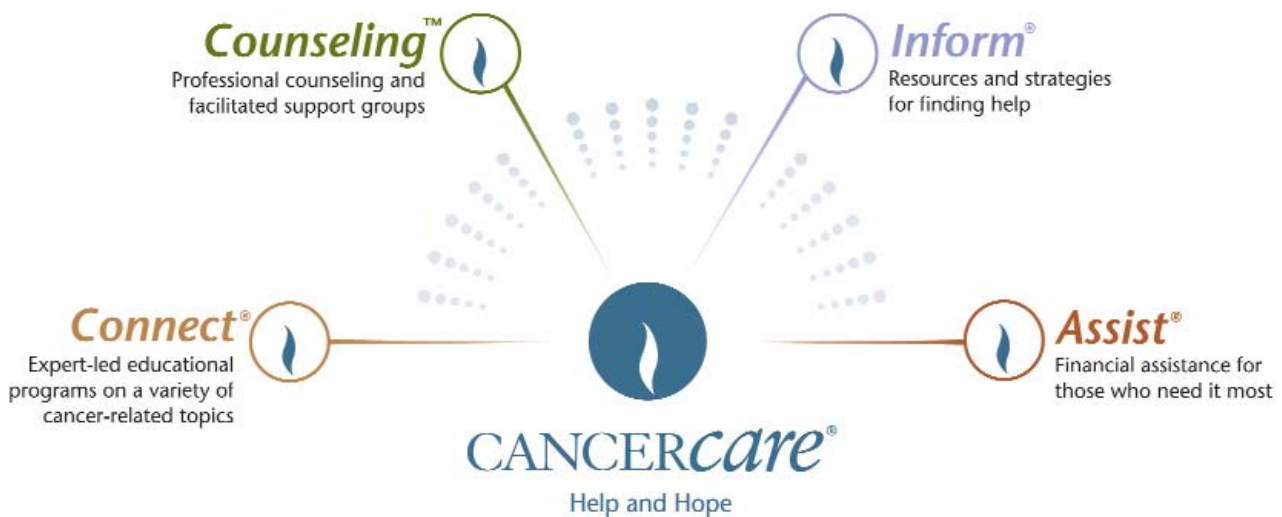
Plan for special days when you may need more support. Your parent's birthday, Mother's Day, Father's Day, and other holidays during the year can be challenging. Think about how you want to honor your parent on these special days and consider trying a new way to mark or observe the day. You may wish to include other family members or friends in your plans.

It may give you strength to focus on your parent's most significant qualities, those that you will never forget. Consider that these qualities are part of the legacy left to you and everyone else your parent cared about. Holding on to this legacy is way to keep your mother or father close to you, in your mind and heart.

CANCERCARE CAN HELP

CancerCare's professional oncology social workers understand the complex needs of individuals who are grieving and help you find ways to cope with your grief experience. We offer individual and group counseling by telephone, online, or in person. CancerCare also offers education, information and referrals to other resources to help you and your family members cope and heal.

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