



CANCERcare®

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Grieving the Loss of an Adult Child

As a parent, the death of a child at any age seems to go against the natural order of things. You always expect that your children will outlive you. We invest so much of ourselves in our children that losing a child to an untimely death is like losing a part of ourselves.

Here are some suggestions for ways to comfort yourself while you hold on to the memories of your adult child's life.

Treat yourself with kindness and patience.

Grieving the loss of an adult child is likely to be a journey with many twists and turns. You may feel guilty or ask whether enough was done to help your child. You may be angry about the unfairness of your child's death. Expect to have emotional ups and downs. These are a normal part of the grieving process.



Take care of your health. It is important to maintain your health and strength as you cope with this traumatic loss. For example, eat properly, get enough sleep, and take any medicines your doctor may have prescribed.

Plan how to cope with special days. Special days such as birthdays and holidays may be difficult to manage. Discuss with your family what you might do to honor your adult child's memory on these special days.

Share your feelings. Seek out the company of family members and friends who respect your feelings of sadness. Sharing your memories of your adult child with others can be helpful.

Gather all your favorite photos. You may already have photos in albums or books, but some pictures may have special meaning. Have those pictures enlarged and framed, or place them in a special album. If there is a photo you love that was taken by a friend or family member, ask him or her for a copy to keep.

Create a special remembrance of your adult child. A tribute to honor your adult child's memory may be private or public. For example, you might light a special candle or plant a tree or garden in your child's memory. For a more public tribute, consider working with a place of worship, park, foundation, or other organization to create a special plaque or fund in your child's memory.

Seek comfort from your spiritual beliefs. All faiths have ways of offering comfort during times of grief. Many parents find that support and

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practical help from people who share their faith also makes a difference. Others get comfort from prayer and meditation. You may find it helpful to discuss your feelings about the loss of your adult child with a clergy person who has experience working with grieving parents.

Keep a journal. Putting your thoughts and feelings on paper may help you feel more in control. Writing down your memories of your adult child can be comforting and can serve as a record of your child's life and legacy.

Get specialized help. Counseling is available to help you manage your feelings, understand the grief process, and focus on the day-to-day tasks that need to be done. One of the goals of bereavement counseling is to help you find a way to cherish your memories of your adult child while remaining open to new experiences in your life. At *CancerCare*, you can receive free counseling from oncology social workers who specialize in helping people affected by cancer.

Join a support group. Talking to other parents who have lost an adult child to cancer can help you feel less alone in your grief. Bereavement support groups led by trained counselors, such as those offered by *CancerCare*, offer a chance to share and learn from others.



CancerCare Can Help

CancerCare's professional oncology social workers are available to help you cope with the loss of a loved one to cancer. We provide free individual counseling and support groups over the telephone, online and in person. *CancerCare* also offers practical help and referrals to other resources. For more information, call **1-800-813-HOPE (4673)** or visit www.cancer.org.



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