

# Grieving the Loss of an Adult Child

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

Being a parent comes with many feelings of responsibility. Sometimes we feel responsible for situations and events we cannot control.

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

**Treat yourself with kindness and patience.** Your needs are important during this time. Parents who lose an adult child to cancer often experience guilt and doubt about whether enough was done to help their child. These feelings, while common, usually reflect anger about how unfair it is that their child has died. At a time when you are feeling sadder than you could ever imagine, such feelings add to the pain. Eating properly, getting enough sleep, and taking any medicines your doctor may have prescribed will help you maintain your health and strength as you cope with this traumatic loss.

**Share your feelings.** Seek out the company of family and friends who respect your feelings of sadness. You need the opportunity to share your memories about your adult child with others. You may feel a need to concentrate on your loss, but be sure to let people know about your child's life and what you shared together.

**Gather all your favorite photos.** You may already have photos in albums or books, but there are probably some pictures that are especially meaningful to you. Have those 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 them for a copy to keep.

**Create a special remembrance of your adult child.** There are many ways to do this. Some remembrances are private and personal, and may include things like lighting a special candle or planting a tree or garden in your child's memory. Other, more public ways to memorialize your adult child include working with places of worship, parks, foundations, and other organizations to create a tribute, such as a special plaque or fund.

**Seek comfort from your spiritual beliefs.** All faiths have ways to help you gain comfort during your time of grief. Many parents find that emotional and practical help from other people who share their faith makes a difference. Others get comfort from prayer and meditation. It is common for parents who lose an adult child to cancer to feel angry that their child was not cured or spared. Voicing these feelings and discussing them with a clergy person who has experience working with grieving parents may help you once again feel comforted by your faith.



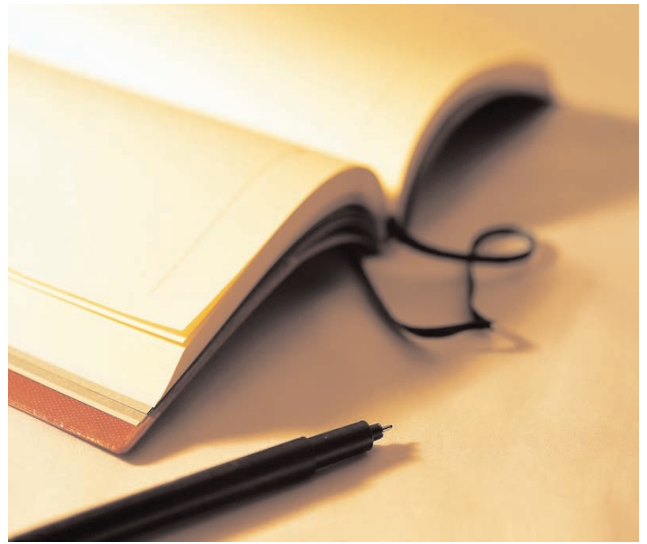
**Keep a record of your emotional journey.** Grieving the loss of an adult child will probably take you on many twists and turns, and many factors can affect how you are feeling. For example, special days, such as birthdays or holidays, are often difficult to manage. Writing about your thoughts and feelings might help you feel more in control. Recording your memories of your adult child can give you comfort and serve as a “history” of your child’s life. Remember that celebrating your adult child’s legacy can be part of recognizing and respecting the sadness of his or her death.

**Join a support group.** Talking to other parents who have lost an adult child to cancer can help you feel less alone with your grief. Professionally led bereavement support groups, such as those offered by CancerCare, provide opportunities for sharing and learning from others.

**Get specialized help.** Individual counseling can help you learn how to manage your feelings, understand the grief process, and focus on the day-to-day tasks that need to get done. One of the goals of bereavement counseling is to help you find a way to hold on to your connection to your adult child while letting yourself experience new things in your life.

### **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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