

HEALING THE ADULT CHILD'S GRIEVING HEART

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100 PRACTICAL IDEAS
AFTER YOUR PARENT DIES

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1.

UNDERSTAND THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN GRIEF AND MOURNING

- Grief is what we think and feel on the inside when someone we love dies.
- Mourning is the outward expression of our grief.
- Everyone grieves when someone loved dies, but if we are to heal, we must also mourn.
- Many of the ideas in this book are intended to help you mourn the death of your parent, to express your grief outside of yourself. Over time and with the support of others, to mourn is to heal.
- Mourning the death of a parent isn't always easy. As a society, we tend to perpetuate the myth that the death of a parent—particularly an elderly parent—is to be expected and should be “gotten over” quickly. So if you express your grief outside yourself, your friends and even your family may not support you.
- If some of your friends and family are not compassionately supporting your need to mourn, seek out the company of those who will.

CARPE DIEM

Ask yourself this: Have I been mourning my parent's death or have I restricted myself to grieving?

2.

BE COMPASSIONATE WITH YOURSELF

- The journey through grief is a long and difficult one. It is also a journey for which there is no preparation.
- For many people today, the death of a parent is the first death they experience among their close loved ones. This unfamiliarity with death and grief can heighten feelings of disbelief and sadness.
- Be compassionate with yourself as you encounter painful thoughts and feelings.
- Don't judge yourself or try to set a particular course for healing. There is no one way to grieve the death of a parent. There is only what you think and feel and the expressing of those thoughts and feelings.
- Let your journey be what it is. And let yourself—your new, grieving self—be who you are.

CARPE DIEM

If you have the energy, take a walk today through a quiet area of town. Or better yet, get out of town and find a “safe place” in nature. Rest when you're tired and contemplate the ways in which you might take better care of yourself in the coming weeks and months.

3.

DON'T EXPECT YOURSELF TO MOURN OR HEAL IN A CERTAIN WAY OR IN A CERTAIN TIME

- Your unique grief journey will be shaped by many factors, including:
 - the nature of the relationship you had with the parent who died.
 - the age of the parent who died.
 - your age.
 - the circumstances of the death.
 - your family's coping and communication styles.
 - your unique personality.
 - your cultural background.
 - your religious or spiritual beliefs.
 - your gender.
 - your support systems.
- Because of these and other factors, no two deaths are ever mourned in precisely the same way. If both of your parents have died, you may find yourself mourning the two deaths in very different ways or similarly.
- Don't have rigid expectations for your thoughts, feelings and behaviors. Instead, celebrate your uniqueness.

CARPE DIEM

Draw two columns on a piece of paper. Title the left column "What I used to think it would be like after my mother/father died." Title the right column "What it's really like." Jot down notes in both columns.

4.

ALLOW FOR NUMBNESS

- Feelings of shock, numbness and disbelief are nature’s way of temporarily protecting us from the full reality of the death of someone loved. They help us survive our early grief. I often say, “Thank God for numbness and denial.”
- We often think, “I will wake up and this will not have happened.” Mourning can feel like being in a dream. The world feels distant, almost unreal—especially the lives of other people. The world turns, but you may not feel it. Time moves, but you may not experience it.
- Your emotions need time to catch up with what your mind has been told. This is true even when death has followed a long illness.
- Even after you have moved beyond these initial feelings, don’t be surprised if they reemerge. Birthdays, holidays and anniversaries often trigger these normal and necessary feelings.

CARPE DIEM

If you’re feeling numb, cancel any commitments that require concentration and decision-making. Allow yourself time to regroup.