

Cruse Bereavement Care



The Death of a Parent

Parents are special. Although it is in the natural order of things to expect your parents to die before you, many people are surprised by the complexity and depth of their grief when this happens.

For many of us, the death of a parent is a significant loss and creates a variety of changes for us as individual, and for the family. Feelings may be complicated and there is no 'right' way to react.

Some of the effects of bereavement can be surprising or even frightening. As well as shock, grief or numbness, people often feel guilt or anger. The feelings can be numerous and contradictory and emerge when least expected, causing confusion and distress.

We feel lost after the death of a mother or father. Suddenly we may find ourselves feeling like an abandoned child, even though we are adults with jobs, families and lives of our own. These feelings are normally buried under the day-to-day business of living.

The death of a parent can bring home the inevitability of our own death, and perhaps make it seem nearer than it was before. The balance of generations changes; before we were still someone's child; now we find ourselves the older generation and that can be a shock. While our parents were alive, we could assume that we probably had plenty of life ahead. It can be uncomfortable to face thoughts of our own mortality, which are normally hidden by everyday life.

Effect on other relationships

A death in the family can bring people together, but it can also create tensions and strains such as reawakening old rivalries between siblings. Some families are able to support one another, but there may be individual members who are unwilling or unable to share their feelings and prefer to be left alone. Relationships between partners can also be affected. There is no one way for families to deal with their grief.

If one parent has died, our relationship with the parent who is still alive may alter. This is particularly so if we had always thought of our parents together, as a partnership, and now find ourselves rediscovering the remaining parent as a separate person. We may even be shocked if they want to start a new relationship.

After the death of a parent, many people experience a change in the way they see themselves and the way others see them. We may have looked after an ill parent for some time or had regular contact, and this role has now disappeared. This can come as a release but may also create a period of unease and a sense of isolation.

What can help?

- Talking with families or friends
- Keeping some of your parent's possessions
- Receiving advice on practical issues
- Flexible arrangements with employers