

Grief Notes

July 2021

Grieving the Death of a Parent by Linda Hopkins, Bereavement Coordinator

The death of a parent is special in many ways. Unlike the death of a child, the death of a parent occurs in the natural order of things. Despite this, one is often shocked. With modern medical treatments, we get so used to people surviving health crises that when death comes, it can feel sudden and unexpected even when the person is on hospice. As with many deaths, shock along with the busyness of funeral arrangements and taking care of practical needs can keep one distracted. Grief may hit hard not only right away but also after several months have passed. This can be hard to understand but it often happens that way as the reality of absence deepens and as some of the shock wears off.

With a parent's passing, a person who has known you your whole life is gone. Often people regret that they did not ask their parent more while they were still alive and able to share stories and memories. They may have been so busy with caregiving that conversation did not occur. We often do not realize how much time we have left.

The loss of a parent to whom one was close leaves a huge hole. People who mean to comfort the bereaved often say things like, "At least he had a good long life," which, while true, does not acknowledge the grief felt at the death of someone who has known us since birth.

Not all relationships are the same. Some are happy and close while some are troubled. Grieving the death of a parent with whom one had a troubled relationship is often difficult. There is painful "unfinished business" without the opportunity for it to get better. With the death of both parents, special issues arise, and some people feel like "orphaned adults."

After a parent's death, life will be unsettled. Siblings may struggle with estate business and responsibilities in a background of old relationship issues from childhood. There may be a new head of the family. There may be worry for a parent who is still alive. Often parents are the family members around whom all others gather. What will bring family together now? Staying connected takes work and understanding.

The death of a parent is a rite of passage that challenges us. Becoming a member of the oldest living generation is unfamiliar territory and it brings a real awareness of mortality. Having support can help. If you would like to speak with one of our Northern Light Home Care & Hospice Bereavement Coordinators, please give us a call.

If you would like to read more about grieving the death of a parent, here are some suggested resources:

Grieving the Death of a Mother by Harold Ivan Smith

On Grieving the Death of a Father by Harold Ivan Smith

Healing the Adult Child's Grieving Heart by Alan Wolfelt

The Orphaned Adult by Alexander Levy

