

When a Parent Dies: An Adult's Perspective...

Adults learn “proper” and “acceptable” forms of mourning. The fears and concerns that arise when an adult’s parent dies are different from a child’s, but the grief is no less intense. Most adults know that they can physically survive without their parents, but the emotional ties are still strong. The adult may have a greater appreciation of the parent’s role in their life, and the sacrifices that were made raising them.

Since most adults lead lives with some independence from their parents, the focus of grieving shifts. Adults may not wonder who will care for them; rather, a parent’s death may stimulate more introspective concerns. The adults may grieve their parent’s death in the sense of passage of time. There may be a feeling of a loss of rootedness; an important link to the past is now gone. The adult may question his/her place in life, realizing that death is inevitable. As adults grow and appreciate their parents, there is an added element of losing a dear friend.

The feelings and emotions associated with the grief of a parent’s death can be quite numbing and devastating. This is true in spite of the fact that most often some anticipatory grief will take place. Anticipatory grief is the ability to mourn the *expectation* of death. In other words, an adult realizes that his parents will not live forever. As the adult’s parents grow older, that adult begins to grieve gradually as the problems of aging begin to surface. An important note: at the point of death, the shock and disbelief are just as evident as at an unexpected death.

Adult concerns may center around the loss of the parent as the focal point of the family. The adult family must deal with “keeping the family together”, a role so often attributed to the parents. The adult family must be aware of role changes within the family structure. These changes must be monitored and encouraged, as this shifting is necessary to maintain the family stability. If grandchildren are involved, special attention and sharing of grief must be promoted as well.

To summarize, the death of a parent is difficult and challenging. Children and adults may differ in styles and force of grief; however, the feelings and emotions that come with death are very similar. The journey through grief is long and arduous; however, the potential for growth and understanding is limitless for the child as well as the adult.

“A Journey of One Thousand MilesBegins With a Single Step.”

~ By Mark T. Scrivani