

# G R I E F N O T E S

## Adult Children Coping with the Death of a Parent

It is difficult and at times very painful to say goodbye to a parent. It is a parent who first introduces us into the world; they love and guide us as we grow into adults. Parents link us to our past and for some, continue to serve as advisors and confidants well into adulthood.

The process of saying goodbye is often a long and emotionally exhausting journey. Grief affects every fiber of our being. Common side effects of grief include pain, anger, fear, lack of concentration and overwhelming sadness. Here are some thoughts to keep in mind as you learn to live without your parent in your life.

### **IMPORTANT POINTS TO REMEMBER:**

- You may experience other losses. You not only lose your parents, you lose your cheerleaders, advisers, friends, confidants and the unconditional love they have showered on you for so many years. Some, however, may now be free from responsibility of care giving, from being the scapegoat of things that have gone wrong in a parents life, free from unrealistic expectations and the emotional abuse imposed by parents.
- If this is the second parent to die, then you may feel like an orphan. The feelings of being “orphaned” are not limited to ages birth – 18.
- The death of the second parent may surface old grief issues from the first parents death. It is important to resolve these grief issues. These old issues can add to the pain of your current loss.
- A parent’s death may cause problems with brothers and sisters. Arguments about funeral arrangements and dividing the parent’s personal property as well as feelings of bitterness from childhood may appear during this time. This is common and natural. Establishing an open line of communication can be very helpful.
- Recognize the loss that your surviving parent is coping with at this time. A marriage of 30, 40, 50 or 60 years is a lifetime. Moving on from this loss will take a long time. Don’t push them into activities

and programs during the first year. Encourage them to get out with people and be supportive if this is too difficult for them. REMEMBER: You don't get over grief, you learn to live with it!

- Grief following the death of your parent will be different for each family member. There is no “right way” to grieve. If you have young children, it is important to have someone available to answer questions and “be there” for them. This may be too difficult for you at this time, so find a trusted and caring family member or friend to provide this support.
- Recognize the limitation grief presents you with at this time. Remember grief work is a series of baby steps, not giant leaps. Prioritize what has to be done and what can wait.
- Creating a tribute to your parent can be a creative and healthy coping tool. Plant a tree or small perennial garden in their memory. Donate a copy of your parent's favorite book or music CD in their memory to your local library. Create a special memory box and/or photo album. Fill them with favorite pictures and other mementos.
- If you continue to struggle with intense grief emotions after six months, consider seeking additional support. Counseling and grief support groups can help.

#### **Suggested Reading List for Death of a Parent:**

Angel, Marc *The Orphaned Adult – Confronting the Death of a Parent*  
Insight Books, 1987

Anker, Lois *How to Survive the Loss of a Parent*. William Morrow Publishing, 1993.

Brooks, Jane *Midlife Orphan* Berkley Publishing Group, 1999

Kennedy, Alexandra *Losing a Parent* Harper San Francisco, 1984.

Myers, Edward *When Parents Die* Penguin Books, 1986

For more grief information contact Hospice Bereavement Services at 315-265-3105 or  
by e-mail [mjones@hospiceslv.org](mailto:mjones@hospiceslv.org)

**Hospice & Palliative Care of St. Lawrence Valley, Inc.**  
**6805 U.S. State Highway Route 11**  
**Potsdam, New York**  
**315-265-3105**  
Hospice & Palliative Care of St. Lawrence Valley

