



CANCERcare®

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fact sheet

GRIEVING THE LOSS OF AN ADULT CHILD

As a parent, you expect and hope that your children will outlive you. The idea of losing a child, no matter their age, is inconceivable. You might feel as if you have lost a piece of yourself. It is important to have an appropriate support system in place as you navigate your feelings and emotions.

HERE ARE SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR COPING WITH THE LOSS OF AN ADULT CHILD

Treat yourself with kindness and patience. You might find yourself experiencing many different emotions as you grieve the loss of your adult child. You may be angry about the unfairness of your child's death and wonder if there was anything more that could have been done. You may feel something called survivor guilt and find yourself asking, "Why not me instead?"

Take care of your health. It is important to maintain your health and strength as you cope with this traumatic loss. Do your best to eat properly, get enough sleep, exercise and take any medications your doctor may have prescribed.

Plan how to cope with special days. Special days such as birthdays and holidays may be difficult to manage. Discuss with your family in advance what you might do to honor your adult child's memory on these special days. You might also want to do something special to honor them on your own.

Share your feelings. Seek out the company of family members and friends who share and respect your feelings, no matter what they might be. Exchanging memories of your adult child with others can be helpful.



Gather all your favorite photos. Some pictures of your child may have special meaning or may remind you of a specific memory. Have those pictures enlarged and framed or place them in a special album. You might also want to keep a small photo in your wallet to have with you at all times. Ask your family members or friends if they have any photos of your child that you can copy or keep.

Create a special remembrance of your adult child. A tribute to honor your adult child's memory may be private or public. For example, you might light a special candle or plant a tree or garden in your child's memory. For a more public tribute, you might consider having a memorial ceremony or working with a place of worship, park, foundation or an organization that your child was passionate about to create a special plaque or fund in their memory.

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Seek comfort from your spiritual beliefs. All faiths have ways of offering comfort during times of grief. Many parents find that support and practical help from people who share their faith can also make a difference. Others find comfort in prayer and meditation. You may find it helpful to discuss your feelings about the loss of your adult child with a clergy person who has experience working with grieving parents.

Make room for your grief during the holidays. You might want to maintain the same traditions you had with your child, or you might want to start new traditions. This may help you to feel less pressure and will hopefully allow for moments of peace, solace or even joy that may come your way as you remember your adult child and spend time with your loved ones.

Keep a journal. Putting your thoughts and feelings down on paper may help you feel more in control. Writing down your memories of your adult child can be comforting and can serve as a record of your child's life and legacy. Some find it helpful to write daily or weekly letters to their child to remain connected.

Get specialized help. Counseling is available to help you manage your feelings, understand the grief process and focus on the day-to-day tasks that need to be done. Some of the goals of bereavement counseling include learning productive ways to cope with your emotions and how to cherish memories of your adult child while remaining open to new experiences in your life. At CancerCare, you can receive free counseling from oncology social workers who specialize in helping people affected by cancer.

Join a support group. Talking to other parents who have lost an adult child to cancer can help you feel less alone in your grief. Bereavement support groups led by professional social workers, such as those offered by CancerCare, offer a chance to share with and learn from others.



CancerCare Can Help

Founded in 1944, CancerCare is the leading national organization providing free support services and information to help people manage the emotional, practical and financial challenges of cancer. Our comprehensive services include counseling and support groups over the phone, online and in-person, educational workshops, publications and financial and co-payment assistance. All CancerCare services are provided by professional oncology social workers and world-leading cancer experts.

To learn more, visit www.cancercare.org or call **800-813-HOPE (4673)**.

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