

The death of a parent can be one of the most significant losses a person ever experiences and the emotional reaction can be tremendous. This fact sheet discusses how to:

- Cope with your first reactions to the loss
- Take care of your own mental health
- Move forward with your memories



Coping With Loss

Recognize the scope of your loss. Coping with the loss of a parent means learning to live without a person you may have known your entire life who may have played a large role in your growth and development. Try to acknowledge the many ways they impacted you.

Allow yourself to grieve. You may feel angry, upset, numb, depressed and anxious. All of these feelings are appropriate given what has happened. Try to let yourself grieve in the way that feels right for yourself.

Give yourself time. Try not to force yourself to “get over” the loss in any set period of time. Acknowledge and embrace your powerful emotions. When it feels comfortable to do so, find the time to reflect on the past and hold onto memories.



Take Care of Your Mental Health

Get help for yourself. You don't have to face your emotions alone. A counselor or therapist can help you cope with grief and powerful emotions. CancerCare has oncology social workers that can help.

Join a support group. Support groups can provide a safe, supportive environment to help people who are grieving. CancerCare offers free, professionally led support groups for the bereaved. Call 800-813-HOPE (4673) for more information.



Ways to Help Yourself Moving Forward

Hold on to your memories and begin a new legacy. Though death separates you from a parent physically, your emotional connection continues to exist and grow through memory. Think about your parent's strengths and the impact that they had on your life and the lives of others. You may wish to honor your parent's memory by volunteering for cancer organizations or involving yourself in a cause that your parent felt passionately about. Consider creative outlets and keep memories present through mindfulness, writing, drawing, collaging or creating slideshows. Commemorating and honoring your parent—through activities or projects of any size—can help you cope with the grieving process and heal.

Plan for special days when you may need more support. Feelings may be magnified on birthdays, anniversaries, Mother's Day, Father's Day and other holidays. Think about how you want to honor your parent on these days. Create new rituals or support old traditions with family members and/or friends, and mark or observe the day in ways that can bring comfort to you.

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 resource navigation, 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 master's-prepared 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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