

## 8 Tips for Coping With the Death of a Parent

by Nancy Stordahl

I was supposed to be ready when my mother died in 2008 from metastatic breast cancer. I was supposed to be ready to say goodbye. After all, she was in her seventies and had been ill for quite some time. I was not a child or even a young adult. At my age I was supposed to be ready. My mother's cancer had been diagnosed four years earlier, so I was supposed to be ready. Her cancer had metastasized and her prognosis was very poor, so I was supposed to be ready. Her health had been rapidly declining before my eyes and she was living out her final days in a care facility, so I was supposed to be ready. My family and I knew the end was coming, so I was supposed to be ready.

### **But I was not.**

Society gives few messages and the ones that are given seem mixed about how to "appropriately" grieve for parents. In his book, *When Parents Die: A Guide for Adults*, Edward Myers states, "Loss of a parent is the single most common form of bereavement in this country. Yet the unstated message is that when a parent is middle-aged or elderly, the death is somehow less of a loss than other losses. The message is that grief for a dead parent isn't entirely appropriate."

After all, the death of a parent is the natural order of things.

When a parent dies, we are supposed to be prepared for this normal life passage, or at least be more ready to accept it when it happens. We are expected to pick ourselves up, close the wound quickly, and move on. We should not require much time to get over it.

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Again, the death of a parent is the natural order of things.

However, just because the death of a parent is common place and is the natural order of things, this does not mean a person can or should be expected to simply and quickly bounce back. On the contrary, the death of one's parent(s) is extremely difficult for most if you have had a good relationship with your parent(s) and even if you haven't. In fact, sometimes the latter makes it even more difficult due to unresolved issues or conflicts.

When a parent dies, it can be unexpectedly devastating and cause considerable upheaval in even an adult son or daughter's life. The magnitude of this loss can take you by surprise and helpful resources are not that plentiful.

**Here are a few suggestions for coping when a parent dies:**

1. Don't expect to be ready for the natural order of things; you won't be.
2. Never let anyone belittle this loss, make you feel guilty for grieving deeply, or hurry you through your grief. You are entitled to feel all of grief's intricacies and all of grief's intensity.
3. Grieving for a parent, like all grief, can be exhausting emotionally, physically and spiritually. Be kind to yourself.
4. This work of grief takes time; the process must not be hurried. And it is never entirely over.
5. Even as an adult, don't be surprised by feelings of abandonment and uncertainty that you experience.
6. After they are gone your parents will continue to be a part of your life, just in a different sense. You will always be their son or daughter.
7. Grief does not end. Rather grief comes and goes. And then it comes again.
8. If you feel the need, seek out support from others who've been there, a friend who cares, or a professional who can help guide you through the work of grief.

When a parent dies, yes, it is the natural order of things.

But taking time to grieve for them should be as well.

Hospice & Palliative Care  
of Chenango County

# Free Grief Support

Hospice and Palliative Care of Chenango County aims to support those who are grieving in our community by offering individual counseling, group counseling, family counseling and support groups to anyone in the community who has recently lost a loved one. Our grief counseling support is completely free and available to both children and adults.

**For more information call  
Rachel Barletta at (607)334-3556**

## **HOSPICE** Kids Corner

### **Mother's Day for Grieving Children**

May 6th from 5:00-6:00pm

Hospice would like to invite all children in Chenango county that have experienced the death of their parent or guardian to join us for an event in honor of Mother's Day. We will be making crafts while we share feelings and experiences related to grief. Hospice will provide all supplies, and dinner is included. This event will be held at the Hospice Office. Please RSVP by May 4th, 2020.



OF CHENANGO COUNTY

Caring for Chenango County Families Since 1991

## March—May 2020 Support Group Dates

### May

5/6— Mother's Day Group for Children 5:00-6:00

*Individual and family support is available on an as-needed basis.  
Please contact the office for more information.*



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