

GRIEVING FOR AN ADULT CHILD

Those of us whose adult child has died have to contend with some unexpected responses including people believing that the pain of losing them is less than that of losing a younger child.

The role of a parent lasts for all of our lives, and so the death of a child of any age may make us feel that we have failed to protect and support them. We will miss the friendship that has grown from knowing and loving them over the years.

Complex grief

Deaths of adult children may be sudden and unexpected, often requiring a post mortem and sometimes an inquest. Further complications may arise if the death occurred abroad.

Others lose their lives following a long illness and we may have watched their decline in hospital or have cared for them at home. Some children may have led unconventional lives, been involved in prostitution, living rough, or serving a prison sentence.

You may then suffer a complex grief, with shame, guilt and regret mixed with our other emotions.

Your child may have left home, moved overseas or even broken off contact. We will have already adjusted to their daily absence but the sad task of clearing out their new home, notifying everyone of the death, possibly arranging for repatriation and organising the funeral may still fall to us.

If your child was married or in a civil partnership, then the bereaved spouse will normally be next of kin, and he or she will have the responsibility for planning the funeral, and all the legal matters dealing with the estate.

You must accept that they have the legal right to have their decisions carried out, however hard that may be for you to bear.

Survival guilt

For those of us who are elderly, you may have become dependent on our child in a number of ways and if our partner is still alive, we may have felt assured that when one of us died, our child would be there to care for the one who was left behind. Older parents may have intense feelings of survival guilt, wondering why, after a long and full life, they should be alive when their child has died.

If your child had a partner we may have had a good relationship with them and will wish to sustain it. However after a time the widowed spouse may wish to live with a new partner or to remarry. It can be painful to hear grandchildren call a stepparent "Mummy" or "Daddy". Some of us are grandparents who have to take on the care of your grandchildren, temporarily or permanently. The children will need extra special comfort and understanding, which may be difficult for you in our own grief.