



HOSPICE MESSAGES OF HOPE

Grieving the Loss of an Adult Child

It is not normal. It is not natural. It is unfair. For many who are experiencing the loss of an adult child, these are common feelings.

In addition to the feeling that something has been taken from you, the loss of an adult child can carry its own unique set of feelings that may differ from other kinds of losses. One such feeling is anger. Losses of any kind can produce feelings of anger. However, with the death of a child, feelings of anger can be intensified by the additional sense of unfairness associated with losing someone who “died before their time.”

The feeling that can be unique to the death of a child can be summed up in the statement, “it should have been me.” This is a common feeling that echoes back to the “unnaturalness” of the death. For those who are experiencing this sort of loss, it is normal to feel this way. Though mentally there may be an understanding that death is no discriminator of age, the feeling may still remain that the death of a child is outside the natural order of things. You may also experience disorganization, inability to concentrate, vulnerability, panicky thoughts and irritability.

MAINTAIN YOUR RELATIONSHIPS

It is important to keep your connection strong with your other children. They are also experiencing the loss and will be sensitive to changes in behavior from their parents. It is just as important for parents to share their grief and feelings with each other. Otherwise, a barrier begins to develop between them in their marital relationship. Anger can be misdirected when one is coping with the death of a child. People who are grieving may find themselves experiencing intense anger for those they love. They may become outwardly angry with family, friends or even God. Grieving parents may also become inwardly angry with themselves feeling overwhelming emotions such as shame or guilt.

No matter what you may or may not feel, it must be noted that people grieve differently. This is especially important to understand within the context of a marriage or a family. Grief is a very personal experience. There is no right or wrong way to grieve. How you grieve is unique to you. It is influenced by your culture, upbringing and grieving experiences.

The key is for you to understand your own personal style of grieving and to know that it may differ from that of your spouse or family member(s). The ultimate picture of healthy grieving in families can be found in those who are willing to identify the ways in which others are grieving and to come along side of them with acceptance and support even if their styles vary.

BE KIND TO YOURSELF

You must give yourself time and permission to grieve. The reality is that there are no quick fixes when it comes to grief. Grief is much more like the waves of the ocean at the beach than it is like a visit to the nearest drive through. The waves are constant and they are always there.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

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Sometimes they are violent and raging. Other times they are calm. Whether the waves of grief you experience are intense or much more manageable, they never truly cease altogether. Coping with the waves becomes a lifelong endeavor. It takes time and it takes your personal permission to allow yourself to experience it for as long as it takes.

While you are experiencing your loss you must not expect too much of yourself, particularly at the beginning of your experience. Chances are you will be numb and will find it difficult to function. Let others help you if possible.

Identify your sources of support:

- Are there family members or friends you could turn to when you are having a tough time?
- Is there a local support group in your church or community?
- When you are grieving, it is important to know that you are not alone. One word of caution - it is not the quantity of people you have around you that is important, it is the quality that matters. It is far better to have one close friend who will simply listen to you than it is to have a room full of people who will try to offer you advice.

As you begin to identify any sources of support you may have, it will be very important that you learn how to express your grief in appropriate ways. Grief is a unique experience to every individual. Some may journal and others may paint or dance. The loss of an adult child is a devastating event. In the face of your loss you must find ways to manage your grief. Give yourself time. Do not expect too much from yourself. Find support.

OSF Home Care Services is here to support you and wants to meet you wherever you are in your grief journey.

