

## **When an Adult Child Dies**

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Parents whose children precede them in death may feel a lack of support, in part because it is focused on other survivors, such as the child's spouse or children, and in part because there simply is little recognition of the powerful and continuing bond that exists between parent and child, even after the child is an adult and independent.

Parents whose adult children die may feel a sense of injustice that challenges their spiritual beliefs. Often, such a loss may be one of many that the parent is experiencing. As individuals age, they may have to relinquish cherished roles or activities. In short, the death of an adult child may add to a litany of losses, making coping difficult.

When adult children die, parents may lose a critical source of support in their own lives. The child may have provided emotional, physical, or even financial support. The parent may have experienced a sense of vicarious achievement in the child's successes. The parent may feel a deep sense of disappointment that the adult child never accomplished his or her life goals. Sometimes the death of an adult child can affect other relationships for a surviving parent; relationships with the surviving spouse or grandchildren may change.

The surviving parents may feel a lack of control that complicates the loss. They may have little or no control over their adult child's medical treatment or even the funeral or burial. If the parent is feeling as though he or she had little control over the funeral rituals or if these rituals were not meaningful, the parent may wish to gather his or her own friends for a ritual.

It is critical to validate that grief, to recognize that the death of a child, regardless of age or circumstance, is always a horrendous event. Support is critical. There may be value in seeking counseling or joining a support group. Finally, it is important to acknowledge that others—perhaps a spouse, siblings, children and friends, share this loss. Grieve with them.