

## ADULT LOSS OF A PARENT

This type of loss follows the same pattern of other losses. What makes this type of grief different from other grief? What are the “losses behind the loss” when dealing with the death of a parent?

- The “Abandoned Child” Problem. Your client will probably feel an overall increased sense of vulnerability. Childlike tears and feelings of being “lost” may surface. It won’t matter if the client is 40, 50 or 60, is married with kids or not, he/she may feel cruelly abandoned. After all, Mom or Dad, being immortal, has always been there.
- The “I’m-next-in-line-to-die” Problem. The true realization of one’s own mortality can hit like an earthquake. Such a cataclysm may lead to the next problem.
- The “Mid-life identity crisis” Problem. This is where the client takes a good hard look at the “big picture” of his/her life. “What have I been doing all these years?” “What’s really important to me?” It’s time for some serious values clarification, which may in turn, lead to other losses.
- The “There’s-no-place-like-home” Problem. Often the family home and belongings are sold and dispersed when a parent dies. Now there’s no place to gather for Thanksgiving, no reason to go back to the hometown over summer. Your client may feel much more than the loss of the person; he/she may feel as though an emotional umbilical cord has been severed, that the connection to one’s very “roots” has been lost.
- The “Mom-always-liked-you-best” Problem. There’s nothing like a death of a parent to upset family dynamics. Long-buried sibling rivalries can surface. Un-nerving role-reversals may take place.
- The “Unfinished future-business” Problem. Is the client mourning what should have been the dead parent’s future? The father who will not be there to walk his daughter down the aisle on her wedding day? The grandmother who will not see her grandson graduate from college?
- The “Get-over-it” Problem. There is a very real lack of support for adults losing a parent. The logic behind this is, “... after all, you’re an adult... the parent was old/sick... it’s expected, it’s 'natural', right?” But, it doesn’t feel natural. Much the opposite.

These are just some of the “losses behind the loss” when a parent dies. Exploring these issues can help relieve the guilt, justify the anger, and unscramble the confusion. We do people a service to refer to them as the “adult-child” when they’ve lost a parent, and we will want to give them permission to feel, and to grieve, like a child, as they begin to shape a new adult identity.

Adapted by an article by Sandy McCauley, *Haven Herald*, October 1996