**How to Recover and Find Strength after Losing a Parent**

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**“When we meet real tragedy in life, we can react in two ways – either by losing hope and falling into self-destructive habits or by using the challenge to find our inner strength.” ~Dalai Lama**

There was a period in life I called “the golden era.” Not in hindsight but at the actual time.

I named it such because I felt an overwhelming sense of gratitude.

Everyone I loved was alive and well. I had a good job, a home, and a loving companion. All the things everyone longs for. Little did I know, this “golden era” would end too soon.

One day, out of the blue, Mum asked if I had noticed a change in Dad’s behavior. She described how he could no longer write his signature and would often become distant.

After some tests, we discovered that my father had a brain tumor.

That instantly spelled the end of the golden era and the beginning of a rather painful period. Watching someone who was strong become weak and bedridden, suffer seizures, and eventually drift away eats away at you. It’s difficult to describe the tumultuous wave of feelings that come and overwhelm you. There’s the fear of coping with loss and feeling powerless because you can’t cure the illness and avoid the inevitable.

Losing a parent can feel like losing part of yourself. If they’ve always been there, helping and supporting you, it’s hard to imagine coping without them.

Getting through such a bleak period, however, proved one thing: We are stronger than we think. Somewhere inside us is a resilience we never thought possible.

Use the following steps to uncover your inner strength, overcome grief, and learn to smile again.

**1. Forgive yourself.**

When a parent dies, guilt can become a burden because of past arguments you now regret or maybe because you think you didn’t do enough to help them.

You should realize no parent-child relationship is ever perfect. Disputes, mistakes, and shortcomings occur on both sides and are all in the past. You were still loved even if you were seldom told.

By recognizing the past as something that is finished and unchangeable, you can begin to free yourself from guilt and reflect on the good times instead. The good times are what they would want you to remember.

**2. Face your feelings.**

Feelings of loss or [anger](http://tinybuddha.com/blog/how-to-use-your-anger-to-help-yourself/) can grow stronger if left unchecked, especially if you’ve never known death so close. Exploring ways to cope with these feelings myself led to meditation. Mindfulness meditation is one way to help understand the flow of these feelings.

Imagine sitting on a river bank and watching the boats sail by. Similarly, by watching your thoughts, you’ll see how your grief has influenced your emotions. This “watching” of thoughts creates an awareness of their impact on how you feel that, in turn, reduces the pendulum effect of emotions. By anticipating emotions, you begin to reduce their power.

**3. Keep talking.**

The sudden reality of not being able to chat to your Mum or Dad again can be hard to accept. For a time after losing Dad, I still chatted to him. I asked what he thought of something, but of course I didn’t expect an answer. It was a way of getting the words out that were already in me to say.

Don’t hide from the fact that your parent is gone. Visit the grave, and chat to them in thoughts. Whatever makes you feel comfortable. Not only does it keep their memory alive, but it’s also a release for your feelings.

**4. Look after you.**

Grief can take its toll in many ways. Loss of sleep, reduced appetite, and damaged immune system are not uncommon. The remedy is to protect your health and fitness.

Like pre-flight safety instructions to put on your oxygen mask before helping others, protect your health first to ensure you can heal and help others do the same. You only need to take small steps. Get walking with a friend, eat natural, unprocessed food, and stay hydrated. When your body feels strong, it will [lift your mood](http://tinybuddha.com/blog/30-ways-to-improve-your-mood-when-youre-feeling-down/) and help you cope.

**5. Take time out.**

During the immediate aftermath you’ll have an overwhelming to-do list. From making funeral arrangements to addressing legal matters. It can be physically and mentally exhausting.

It’s vital for your physical and mental health to rest. If you take a vacation to recuperate when things have settled, you’ll be able to return refreshed to help your family over the longer term. Never feel guilty for taking time off.

**6. Avoid comparisons.**

During grief we can become self-conscious of how we’re perceived by others. There is no right or wrong way to grieve, so don’t judge your reaction to loss. You don’t need to look or behave a certain way.

A colleague returned to work recently the day after their father’s funeral, which attracted comment, whereas I took several weeks off. Don’t [worry about how it looks to others or what they might think](http://tinybuddha.com/blog/overcoming-approval-addiction-stop-worrying-people-think/). This is your personal journey and yours alone, so never fear judgment. Do what’s right for you.

**7. Be patient.**

Missing a parent is natural, and if you were very close, you’ll need time to adjust.

Time heals the acuteness of pain, but you may continue to miss your parent. After five years, I still miss Dad very much. Hardly a week goes by that I don’t think of him, but it used to be hardly a day.

Don’t wish time away in the hope you can speed up the healing process. Recovery will happen at its own natural pace.

**8. Support your family.**

The passing of a parent can send a shockwave across the whole family. We might become withdrawn in our own grief and not realize others are sharing in the loss.

So offer your hand in support to other family members. You will avoid feeling isolated if you focus on the needs of others and help other loved ones to cope. As a loving team, you will be able to count on each other at different times to get through the toughest periods together.

**9. Enjoy precious memories.**

There was a time I couldn’t think of Dad without a tear. When I returned to work, I had to make a determined effort not to swell up when colleagues offered condolences.

But I discovered that I could still enjoy my Dad’s “company” by recalling the good times we shared. The laughs, the trips, and the DIY jobs that seemed to take forever.

Don’t avoid reliving your precious moments in your mind’s eye. A time will come when you smile or laugh to yourself just as you did at the time. So let your parent live on in your thoughts, and enjoy seeing them there any time you wish.

**10. Accept the new you.**

As we get older, our opinions and outlook on life can change. The passing of a parent is one of those experiences that will change you. I became more tolerant because life’s trivia was put in context. Worry about missing deadlines, being late for an event, or having a new gadget malfunction. Events that annoy us day to day pale into insignificance.

This change is not for the better or worse; it’s simply a change. [Grief](http://tinybuddha.com/blog/dealing-with-loss-and-grief-be-good-to-yourself-while-you-heal/) increases awareness that all things change, so prioritize what’s really important. Value and enjoy every waking moment, and let the new you grab each precious day with passion.

**Unlock a New Chapter**

Society often writes off the death of a parent as the natural order of events, but those who’ve experienced it know how life-changing it is. You feel hurt and loss because you have a heart but that heart is stronger than you ever imagined.

With the steps above, the same heart can grow in confidence, beat with new hope, and become healthier than ever before. You can still enjoy life, and you should. Life is there to be cherished.

It’s what your parent would have wanted.   
Live your life in the knowledge they’d be happy for you.



**About**[**Alan Marsden**](https://tinybuddha.com/author/alan-marsden/)

Alan Marsden writes authentic advice to help you grow in confidence, health, and happiness. Join Alan on the journey at [sayitwiththelighton.blog](https://www.sayitwiththelighton.blog/).