



*Reading
this may help
you understand
the illness a bit
better and what
lies ahead.*

Guide for Teenagers Whose Parent is Seriously ill

Prepared by Oncology Social Work Team 2019
Cancercare

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**Please be reminded
to make use of the free oncology social work
counselling and emotional support services at any time
during your cancer journey.**



Preparing for loss & understanding death

As an adolescent you understand that death is final and universal.

When you are faced with the death of a loved one, you might have questions about spirituality or religion.

It is normal that your thoughts will shift between your dying parent and your everyday and immediate needs. You will ask questions such as Who am I? Who are my real friends?

Acting out, feeling angry and having questions about the meaning of life are also normal. This behaviour might escalate or it might get better over time

Remember, there is no need to feel ashamed of your thoughts or behaviour. Your surviving mom or dad will be there to give you the necessary support and guidance during these difficult times.

Grieving is normal

You will know when something is wrong.

You may want to cling to your dying parent, or you might be too scared to be in the same room with him or her.

Nobody should force you to do something you don't want to do. You are already traumatised and it is sometimes hard to share emotions. But it is very important that you do find a safe space to share what you feel – with someone in your family or someone outside the family, whatever makes you feel safe and comfortable.

Memory boxes and legacy

Have you ever thought of the legacy your parent will leave behind and how you can honour that memory?

Which values did your mom/dad teach you? Values are things such as honesty, courage and generosity. How can you uphold these in honour of your dying parent?

When your mom/dad passes away and is no longer there in the physical sense, you can hold onto the memories of all the special moments you had together.

Writing your ill mom or dad a letter at every important milestone will be a good way for you to share your feelings and will make them feel happy that you are reaching those milestones so well. For example, if your parent is dying and it is close to your Senior Certificate exam, write a letter about your current favourite subject, what you are struggling with and what challenges you have overcome.

Letter writing is a great too to share with people what you feel. It is safe and allows your voiced to be heard, be brave and try this way of communicating about difficult issues.



The funeral

The funeral is not something anyone likes to or wants to talk about, but as you know, it is a reality that must happen. Allow yourself to be part of the funeral arrangements and to attend preparations and add your thoughts on what should be done to honour your mom or dad. It really is a good way to stay occupied and involved and will help you accept the tragedy you and your family have had to endure.



Continue with your routine

After the funeral, you will need space to grieve in your own way. If you want to go back to school a few days after the funeral, that is quite ok. Being back at school will help you cope with your new circumstances. But if you want more time to get over the worst of the sadness, that is also ok. Everyone will understand.



Supportive counseling

It really will help you to have counselling – talking to a stranger (a professional person who is trained to assist during the grieving process) may be easier for you than talking to your surviving mom or dad, other family members or friends. Sharing how you feel is an important step towards your healing and you need guidance in this process. Asking for help is a strength – not a weakness.



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