YOUR CHILD YOUR FRIEND

When an Adult Child Dies

National Kidney Foundation®

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Foreword

Most parents live with the fear of losing a child. By the time this child has reached adulthood, we breathe a little sigh of relief, thinking that we have gotten them through major childhood diseases, the ups and downs of the teenage years and going away to college. We feel that we can now enjoy their future and ours. This is a time when many parents and adult children begin to bond and have good relationships—they become friends. Then, one day, some of us get the news that our child had died. How can this have happened? Our son or daughter had reached adulthood and we, as parents, were supposed to die first.

In November 1991, my husband Mike and I received that most dreaded news—our 27-year-old daughter, Karen, had died. From that moment on, our lives have never been the same. We have had to learn to live without Karen. As her parents, we were so proud of the loving and caring person she had grown to be. Karen was to become engaged that Christmas and we were looking forward to the upcoming wedding and all the joys it could bring. Now her dreams and ours were not to be.

In the days, weeks and years that have passed, I have met many parents of adult children who are following the same grief road that I am. It has not been easy for any of us. Our family and friends forget that even though our children were adults when they died, we are still, and always will be, their parents. We have the right to grieve as a parent.

I have read many bereavement materials on losing a child, but few address the loss of an adult child. In this booklet, Therese A. Rando focuses both on the general grief of losing a child and the issues that are unique to parents like myself who have lost an adult child. I hope as you read this booklet,

you find peace in knowing that your child will always be with you and has left you his or her legacy.

It has been a long road with many ups and downs, but with the help of my husband, support groups and professionals, I have been able to turn tears of sorrow into tears of joy—joy that I had Karen's love for 27 beautiful years. I pray that in time you will have tears of joy, too.

Barbara Musto
Karen's Mom

Introduction

As a parent whose child has died, you are grieving a very painful loss. There are many different things that can make your grief and mourning more difficult. While these are normal and can be overcome, they can add a great deal to your burden. But with information and help, you can learn to cope with your loss.

This booklet was written to help you understand your experience grieving the loss of an adult child. First, we will discuss the specific challenges you may face. Then, we will suggest ways to cope with those challenges.

The death of an adult child poses two sets of issues to a parent: (1) those that are generally applicable to all bereaved parents, regardless of the age of the child, and (2) those that are unique to parents who lose an adult child. While this booklet focuses mostly on the second set of issues, it would be an oversight not to mention the general issues typically present for parents losing a child at ***any*** age.

General Issues in Losing a Child of Any Age

When your child dies, your reactions to his or her death are called *grief*. Grief involves your psychological, behavioral, social and physical responses to the loss. However, like all mourners, you have to do more than merely react to the loss. You have to learn how to ***cope with*** and ***adjust to*** this loss — to ultimately find a way to incorporate, or to fit, this loss into the rest of your life. This is called *mourning*.

It is important to recognize that while grief is the beginning of mourning, healthy mourning demands more than just expressing grief reactions. It is hard, demanding, active work. It requires making necessary adjustments in your heart, mind, and behaviors in order to reach a place where you can live with the loss of your child in a fashion that appropriately honors and remembers him or her, but does not prevent you from continuing your own life in a healthy way. For bereaved parents, this is especially difficult. But with proper support — and time — it is something that can be done. Nevertheless, there are some built-in difficulties of which you should be aware.

A Difficult Loss

Compared to other types of bereavement, parental mourning is particularly severe in intensity, complicated and long-lasting, with major effects over time. This doesn't mean that you won't be able to cope with your loss and one day find meaning and joy in your life again. It just means that you need more help and more time to do so.

Unfortunately, there are specific issues that come with losing one's child that can complicate mourning. This means that

what might be called "abnormal" or "pathological" after ***other*** types of loss is actually quite normal and expected after the loss of a child. For this reason, you might be incorrectly categorized by others—or even yourself—as being "unhealthy" or "sick" in your bereavement when, in fact, you are only experiencing common and typical reactions for your circumstances.

The Parent-Child Bond: Why It's Hard to Lose a Child

There are four factors of the parent-child relationship that make it intimate and unique. These are the very same factors that intensify the bereavement after the death of a child.

1. The feelings, hopes, and meanings that the parent projects onto the child.

There are no reasons for having a child, and no aspects of the relationship with that child, that do not come with varying amounts of conscious and unconscious parental hopes, needs, feelings, thoughts, expectations, assumptions and meanings built into them.

For better or worse, these become attached to the child. The result is that each child is a blend of whatever he or she symbolically represents to the parents and the actual, distinctly original person that he or she is. When your child died, you lost not just that unique person, but all that you had projected into and onto the child.

2. Responsibilities and expectations.

More responsibilities and expectations exist for the parent-child relationship than for any other relationship. Unfortunately, many of them are quite unrealistic. This becomes problematic because it sets up parents to fail. For example, you may have expected yourself to be all-loving, all-good, all-concerned, totally selfless, and motivated solely

by your child and his or her welfare. While acceptable as ideals, these are often unattainable goals in real human relationships. Nevertheless, you may have internalized these expectations which fail to allow for human frailties; limitations; and normal feelings of frustration, ambivalence and anger.

Parents who lose their children can have increased feelings of guilt and failure. If you feel this way, it may be because you had sustained — and then perceived yourself as having violated — expectations that were inappropriate and unrealistic, and that could never have been met in the first place.

3. Parental roles and identity.

Parents incorporate the roles of protector, provider, nurturer, problem-solver, and advisor into their personal identities. You may have become accustomed to being in control over what happens to and for your child. These roles help you define your feelings about yourself, both as a person and as a parent.

When a child dies, these roles are shattered. This leaves you not only with an oppressive sense of failure, but a perception of being damaged, since fundamental parts of your identity have been assaulted with your child's death. You may suffer greatly from your powerlessness and your inability to carry out what you perceive as the functional role of a parent. This can damage your sense of self.

4. The closeness, intensity, and centrality of the relationship.

The parent-child relationship can be one of the closest and most intense that life generates — physically, psychologically

and socially. In other relationships, the adult is separate from, but connected to, another person. With a child who has sprung physically and/or psychologically from the parent, the child is part of, and in many ways is the same as, the parent. This fact, plus the centrality of the relationship, makes a unique kind of attachment exist between a parent and a child. Because it is different from any other attachment, your mourning will be different, and can be more complicated, than that found after other types of losses.

For all these reasons, the loss of a child is particularly difficult — although not impossible — to fit into your life. You may experience, among other things:

- loss of parenthood function
- loss of parts of the self
- multiple secondary losses
- assault on your parental identity
- massive violation of assumptions, expectations and beliefs about the world, how it works, and the people in it
- unnaturalness of the child dying before the parent
- loss of a sense of immortality
- loss of family subsystems, and of the family as it has been known
- loss of a future caretaker
- intensified grief responses
- complicated mourning.

Bereavement Complications after the Death of a Child

It is well known that a major loss results in psychological, behavioral, social and physical responses in the mourner.

These reactions can be very intense and include:

- guilt
- anger
- anxiety
- separation pain
- search for meaning
- despair
- physical distress
- problems with social support and unrealistic expectations
- upsurges of intense grief when you encounter events that would have occurred had the child lived (for example, weddings, graduations)

The death can bring about many changes between family members and friends. This is because people don't have the same type of grief or have the same needs in their mourning.

Each individual had a different relationship with the person who died, so each individual actually has a different loss. Also, there will be many differences among people because individuals are unique, with diverse backgrounds, personalities, coping styles, and previous experiences — all of which contribute to make one person's bereavement distinctly different from another's. No two people will ever mourn exactly alike!

Common problems in families include:

- difficulties in parenting other children because of grief
- resentment if family members' responses are not what parents feel that they should be
- fear that relationships with surviving children will be less intense and/or negatively impacted

- temporary inability to emotionally invest as before
- over-idealization of the child who died
- comparison of surviving children with an idealized deceased child
- guilt because of overfocus on the child who died
- overprotection of surviving children
- feeling as if surviving children remind the parent of the child who died
- inability to "protect" family members from the parents' grief

Grieving parents clearly represent the worst fear of other adults. Other adults often seek to avoid bereaved parents in order to avoid confronting the possibility that their child could die, too. So, bereaved parents often experience rejection from others. They frequently suffer from the lack of social opportunities and people to support them in coping with the death.

A major problem is that people often don't understand that a parent's bereavement is actually an exception to the general notions about mourning. This is because the things that are necessary to successfully cope with a major loss tend to be compromised by issues that come along with the death of a child. The general rules regarding mourning just don't apply when a person loses a child.

If you are a couple grieving the death....

For couples who are grieving the loss of a child, common problems include:

- failure to realize that each partner is actually mourning a different loss
- stress from expecting the other person to mourn in similar ways

- loss of the support from the other partner because that person is mourning too
- communication difficulties
- sexual problems
- changes in themselves individually, which leads to a changed relationship as a couple
- problems if partners believe the myth that separation or divorce is inevitable after losing a child

Although there are extra challenges after the death of a child, it is false to conclude that it has to lead to pathology or to divorce. Bereaved parents can and do survive. However, in order to do that, they — and those who seek to help them — need to understand the unique dynamics of child loss, and to appreciate how mourning is different for this loss.

You may also find it helpful to read "Honoring Each Other's Grief: Nurturing a Relationship While Coping With the Death of a Child," which can be found on our website **www.kidney.org.**

UNIQUE ISSUES IN LOSING AN ADULT CHILD

In the past, many parents did not live long enough to see their children become adults (for instance, parents would have been dead by the time their 50-year-old son died suddenly from a massive heart attack). Now, with longer lifespans and improved medical technology, there are increasing numbers of parents whose adult children die before them.

When your adult child dies, you must deal with all of the general issues described earlier that are created by the loss of a child at any age. And, you also face a number of other issues that are specific to the death of an adult child.

Relationship with an Adult Child

Your relationship with an adult child is different from when that child was younger. As children mature, there is less physical, hands-on caretaking and more offering of advice and sharing of mutual interests. Your relationship can become more equal.

Some describe the relationship as one of being friends, of having a connection marked by reciprocity and equal access to power and resources. The adult child becomes more independent, and different amounts of emotional and geographical distance often develop naturally. The maturing of the child adds new facets to the relationship. It also adds new dimensions to the loss if this child dies before the parent.

Three Common Issues

Parents who lose adult children typically have to struggle with an angry sense of injustice at seeing their child robbed of life and the enjoyment of reaping the fruits of his or her labors. You may have witnessed your child's struggles for maturity, education and/or job security, which all can appear to come to naught with the death. Responsibilities left unattended — the children left fatherless, the company without its valued employee, the dreams that are unfulfilled — all illustrate the person's absence. Many parents feel bitter disappointment. Some can come to believe that their long-term investment in their child was worthless. The incompleteness of their child's life leaves a gaping void. Grief

is profound. Meaning can crumble.

It's hard to believe the loss has happened. You may be in disbelief because the child has been reared successfully and safely through more dangerous times. For instance, he or she has avoided harm as a youngster, and the perils of adolescence did not result in serious injury. Parents may have felt that now they could "let their guard down" and relax. Their job has been accomplished successfully; they have protected their child and now that child can protect himself or herself. The death painfully points out that parents can never feel totally secure in this area.

Depending on your age and that of your child, role reversals or dependency shifts may have begun. Your child may have been caring for you physically, emotionally, socially, and/or financially, or you might have expected them to do so in the future. You may have relied on your child for your survival. If this is the case, his or her death can compromise your welfare significantly. It not only presents you with emotional and social issues to address, but leaves you with practical concerns and worries about your own survival.

Your Own Lifespan and Developmental Concerns

As the parent of an adult child, you are probably middle-aged or older. At this time in your life, you have concerns about your own lifespan and development, and these affect your grief. Normal but stressful events — such as mid-life crises, aging, retirement, declining health, psychosocial changes, and the experience of other personal losses — all create situations for you in which mourning for the loss of your child can be made even more difficult. You might already be coping with feelings of loss of control, vulnerability, and confusion because of other challenges in your life. Your child's death can make these feelings much worse, or it can create these feelings if they weren't already

there. If you relied heavily on your child for assistance, the loss of your child can even jeopardize your survival.

Some parents ask, "Why wasn't it me?", especially if they are older. Your child's death seems even more unnatural. If you have grandchildren, how can you answer their question, "Why didn't you die instead of my parent? You are so much older" when that is the precise question with which you struggle? And, while you are coping with other personal transitions and losses, the death of your adult child can rob you of a significant source of pride. It can interfere with your ability to feel a sense of continuity, productivity, meaning, and concern for the future and future generations. Your self-esteem can be harmed.

Depending on your age and the resources available to you, you may have lowered strength, abilities, and options that would have distracted you from your pain and provided a place to focus your emotional energy. For instance, you may be retired and not have a job to distract you; you might be unable to walk or drive and thus be unable to visit others; or you might be limited by your physical difficulties, such as poor eyesight that could make it difficult to read.

You might not have a social support system to help you with your grief. This is especially true if you are socially isolated or live in a community where friends and neighbors never knew your child. They may not see the changes in your life and may not react to your loss. Or they may want to respond but be uncertain about how to do so. You might lack support if you already have lost a number of friends and relatives through illness, relocation or death. Some people may acknowledge your loss, but just not reach out to you enough, or in ways that you find helpful.

You may be concerned about having to take care of grandchildren, especially if you are emotionally and physically depleted. While some people are able to manage this successfully, others cannot. If you are unwilling or unable to do so, you might have to deal with your own guilt or others' reactions.

If your adult child was a caretaker to others, and now you have to handle that role, you may also have to deal with your feelings about what that costs you. For instance, you may be forced to lose the traditional grandparent role because you now have to take care of your grandchildren. You might be obligated to assume responsibilities that you thought you were finished with at this time in your life. Or, you might have to change your plans for your retirement.

You need to realize that you will have many different reactions to any adjustments that you have to make in response to your child's death, such as those mentioned above. It is natural to have feelings about these unexpected demands; it does not mean that you are uncaring.

Problems with Acknowledging the Death

You may be unable to believe that your child's death has occurred. This is because it seems unnatural for a child to die before a parent — and, it can also be the result of the circumstances of the death.

If a death is sudden, it is more difficult to grasp and to cope with emotionally. This is because you are unprepared for it, since you did not expect it to happen. When a sudden death occurs, not only do you have to cope with the loss of your loved one, but with the trauma of it happening without warning.

If you are coping with a sudden death, you will have more intense and longer-lasting reactions as you struggle to understand what has taken place. You may be in shock, and it will take you a long time to absorb the reality of your loved one's death. You need to learn to live in a new world without your loved one. It takes time to learn that he or she is no longer present as before, and that changes must be made to deal with this reality.

After a sudden death, it takes a long time to teach you that, despite your most fervent wishes to the contrary, your child has died. It is a long and painful learning process for your heart to accept what you already know “in your head." Don't be surprised if there are times when you temporarily "forget" that your child has died before you finally come to the point of "knowing" it all of the time. Often, after a sudden death, it takes years before you finally register your child's death completely and are able to grasp it fully.

If your child had been living outside of your home, you may experience no dramatic absence to signal to you that the death has occurred. That may also make it difficult to acknowledge the death. For instance, if your child was living in another state, it will be hard for you to grasp that he or she is not still alive there. Because there is not the expectation of seeing your child on a daily basis, it may take a long time before you can comprehend that your loss is permanent and know that your child has, in fact, died. For this reason, the holidays and other occasions on which your family may get together can be particularly difficult for you. It may be only at these times when you can truly realize that your child is dead and will not be coming home.

Social Exclusion

Many bereaved parents find that they are excluded from the concern of others. A parent's grief over the death of an adult child is often overlooked. Instead, attention is often focused on that child's spouse or partner, children, friends, and/or colleagues. People seem to forget that an adult, despite his or her age, is still the child of his or her parents.

For example, at a funeral for a physician who died suddenly at age 59, the priest talked about the impressive contributions of this man to his community, and how he would be missed by his wife, his children, his colleagues, his students, his patients, and the citizens of his state. There was never a mention of his mother, who sat in the front row and went completely unrecognized.

Very simply, your unique bereavement may not be acknowledged, and your loss may feel invalidated. This can cause you to miss crucial support, or to be omitted from important activities following your child's death that could have been therapeutic for you. For example, perhaps you are neglected in being invited to a ceremony in honor of your deceased child. The focus is simply not on you, as it would have been if your child were younger.

Regardless of what anyone thinks, you have the right and need to mourn this loss. Unfortunately, there appears to be a curious social phenomenon in which older individuals are expected to be less grieved by death. Some people might think that previous losses make one immune to grief, or that advancing age means that one is more comfortable with death because of being closer to it. These notions are simply not true. In fact, precisely because of your age and circumstances, you may be more vulnerable as a bereaved parent.

Lack of Control

Because your child was an adult, you may have had less contact with him or her. You probably had less control and decision-making power over him or her than when that child was younger. While this is totally normal, it can cause additional grief and pain if parents fail to appreciate that the increased independence (that is a normal part of a relationship with an adult child) naturally brings more psychological and geographical distance than when the child was younger.

Perhaps you were not intensely involved in your child's last days — or in his or her life in general. This may mean that you didn't participate in your child's care and/or contribute to important decision-making at the end of his or her life. If your child had been maintaining a lifestyle of which you did not approve, made medical treatment decisions you disagreed with, or contributed in some fashion to his or her own death, you can be left with additional sadness, anger, guilt, ambivalence, disappointment, and frustration, among other feelings.

You may regret the independence that you had granted your child, as if magically you could have protected him or her from harm if you had kept more control. A sense of unfinished business can cause you additional distress. You may have feelings of disconnection and regret over not having a closer connection or involvement at the time of the death.

Decreased control and/or lack of everyday contact may mean that you struggle with incomplete information as you attempt to understand the circumstances of your child's death. You may have unanswered questions that can increase your discomfort and complicate your mourning. You will need to determine which questions, if any, have answers, and how to go about getting those answers that are available.

You may also have to deal with concerns about your child's emotional and physical state before death, worries as to whether everything possible had been done to prevent the death, and anxieties about whether all his or her needs had been met. Your grief can be compromised if you believe that there were problems with which you could have helped if you had been more involved. You may be upset with your child's family and friends if you feel that they failed to provide the type of environment, care, or support that you would have wanted for your child. You may have limited control, if any, over decisions regarding funeral rituals and memorial services. Most often the child's spouse/partner is in the decision-making position, often influenced by his or her own family and friends. This can leave you forced to endure rituals with which you do not agree or suffer the absence of those that would be helpful and meaningful to you.

Finally, your image of your child, and what you believe he or she would have wanted, can be in conflict with what their surviving spouse or partner believes to be true. This can cause problems since decisions are made based on a person's knowledge of the deceased. For instance, as the parent, you may recall the religious little boy or girl, whereas his or her family knew the atheist. If funeral rituals are chosen that are consistent with others' knowledge of

your child, but inconsistent with yours, such rituals could be offensive to you. When the situation results in your losing what you want or need as the parent, you understandably can become quite distressed. You may cry, "I cannot make decisions, yet he (or she) was my flesh and blood!"

Secondary Losses

In addition to your child's actual death, you probably are suffering a number of secondary losses. Secondary losses are losses — either tangible or abstract — that develop because of the death.

For example, you have lost the hopes, expectations, meanings, and beliefs that you had for your child. You have lost someone who filled a particular role and met specific needs. If you were at a point in your life where you depended upon your child financially, emotionally, socially, and/or physically, the death can bring you unmet dependency needs. You might feel angry about that — and then feel guilty for feeling angry — even though it is a normal reaction. Practical concerns can develop for you, such as social isolation, financial instability, lack of caretakers, and unmet responsibilities around your home or business. These can result in serious problems that need to be addressed. Even if your child was not caring for you at the time of his or her death, with their death you have lost someone who might have taken care of you in the future. You may be deprived of a source of comfort in your life.

You may feel that your child's death has also robbed you of a source of status and pride. If you received particular respect, or felt significant self-worth, because of your child's position, accomplishments, or very existence, your secondary losses in these areas will need to be mourned as well as the actual death.

Your relationship with your child's family may change with the death. This can be another area of secondary loss for you. For instance, you may lose actual contact with them, or may be fearful that this will occur at some point in the future. You might witness your child's spouse or partner dating others (or remarrying), or see someone take over your deceased child's role in the family — for instance, parenting your grandchildren. This can be particularly painful. A surviving spouse or partner can become more dependent on his or her own parents or family, instead of you, and rely more on others to provide emotional, social, and physical support These actions can all illustrate poignantly to you the absence of your child. You can experience the emotional and physical loss of your child's family. It is not uncommon to fear that grandchildren will forget their deceased parent or not be raised in ways that you feel your child would have wanted.

Other secondary losses can develop after the death of an adult child, such as loss of a family business or the family name. You can lose a sense of personal and family continuity and immortality. You may be in a situation where you feel deprived at not having someone to whom you can bequeath important and symbolic heirlooms. Or, you may have already given these beloved heirlooms to your child and have to face the awkward situation of wanting them back.

SUGGESTIONS TO HELP YOU COPE

The death of your child brings unique issues and demands to you. Here are some specific things that can help you cope:

- Learn about general self-help strategies for coping with grief.
  - ➤ Make sure that you have appropriate information about what to expect as a grieving parent.
  - ➤ Remember that while the loss of a child is very difficult, parents can and do survive meaningfully with sufficient time, support, and personal work.
  - ➤ If you have surviving children, adjust your role with them if needed. Recognize the limits of your control as a parent.
  - ➤ If you are married, recognize that each partner has experienced a different loss, and that you can expect conflicting needs, different coping styles, and impacts that may demand a revamped marital relationship. Single, divorced, widowed, and remarried parents may encounter additional stresses that require attention.
  - ➤ Work to develop coping skills that enable you to take life one small step at a time; mourn in healthy ways; be appropriately assertive; find support; be aware of the importance of taking breaks from grief, with the knowledge that this is not a betrayal of your child; and ultimately reestablish some sense of meaning.
- Recognize the unique issues that you face in the loss of your adult child. It can cause great distress to have unrealistic expectations about your experience, or to incorrectly judge yourself as "sick." Adjust your expectations and seek assistance.

- Don’t let anyone make you feel that you are not entitled to mourn this loss.
- Your child may have become more independent or lived further away from you. You might have been more emotionally distant from each other as they grew up — remember that this is natural and normal. Work to accept that there are limits to your control when it comes to a child of this age.
- Understand that your current lifespan and developmental issues will influence your bereavement too.
- If your physical, emotional, social, and/or financial well-being is compromised in your child's absence, seek help to find ways to meet your needs.
- Look for emotional and social support that legitimizes your particular loss and can nurture and assist you in your mourning.
- Do not think that there is anything wrong with you if you have difficult feelings about all the adjustments you’ve had to make after your child's death.
- Do what you can and ask for help with the rest.
- Know that you will experience some degree of trauma when your child dies suddenly. Understand that this affects your grief and mourning, and that it will take a long while before you are able to comprehend the reality of his or her death completely in your heart and mind. You will only achieve this after being taught the reality of this loss by sufficient experiences of confronting your child's absence.
- Appreciate that you may have some additional difficulties acknowledging the death or grasping its implications if your child had been residing outside of your home, particularly if contact was not on a regular basis.

- Discuss your deceased child and your bereavement with appropriate others, even if these individuals never personally knew your child.
- If there is information that is important for you to know in order to cope, go after it or identify someone who can assist you in getting it.
- If you have few opportunities for healthy diversion from your grief (due to your own developmental, medical, or psychosocial limitations), ask for suggestions and assistance from others.
- Be clear that even though your child's spouse/partner or children may receive primary attention after the death, and may make post death choices for your child that are different from what you would choose, you are still — and always will be — your child's parent. If your anger, resentment, and feelings of exclusion persist, look for people and/or ways to help you deal with them.
- Be prepared that holidays and family gatherings may be particularly difficult for you if your child had moved away. These often would have been the occasions on which he or she would have returned home, and may be the first times that the loss is made real to you.
- If you want continued contact with your child's surviving loved ones, be active in advocating for yourself with them. Recognize that there can be awkward times on both sides when individuals seek to move forward. Work with them to move forward in healthy ways in the new life without forgetting the old.
- Although society may downplay the importance of your feelings, make sure you pay attention to your grief and mourning. Seek the assistance you need.
- If post-death rituals and/or memorials do not meet your

needs, find ways to undertake those that would be useful to you. While you should be aware of and sensitive to possible reactions from your child's loved ones, do not fail to look for ways to meet your own needs in your bereavement. Sometimes this cannot be done without conflict (e.g., a body can't be both buried and cremated), but more than one memorial can be established and yours can be tailored to what you believe your child would want. Like personal bereavement rituals, they can be useful ways of expressing your sentiments and recognizing your loss.

- Recognize that your bereavement may have significant impact on your physical health. Get medical help as necessary.
- Don't be afraid to tell people how to best assist you in your particular bereavement.
- Seek out support groups of parents who have lost adult children.
- If you need professional assistance in coping with the loss of your adult child, do not interpret this as a weakness. You are dealing with one of the most severe stresses possible in life. Find a resource person who understands this type of bereavement and work with them to cope as effectively as possible with this tragedy.

The National Donor Family Council has additional support resources. Please visit us online at: **www.kidney.org/donorfamily**

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