

WOMEN GRIEVE MOTHER'S DEATH

In the natural order of life, women live to see their mothers die.

As inevitable as that event may be, it can be an especially traumatic and complex loss for a woman. Whether her relationship with her mother was close and loving, distant or distressed, death stirs deep emotional responses which may be difficult to manage or resolve.

The impact of a mother's death ripples through several circles of a woman's life. The loss can be felt in a number of ways, from practical to emotional to spiritual. If the relationship was close, the loss of emotional intimacy is profound. If the relationship was ambivalent or troubled, researchers say, unresolved feelings of anger or frustration may become stronger and more disturbing after the mother's death.

Typically, a woman must deal not only with her own reactions to her mother's death, but also those of her family. Women often are expected to be a source of strength for all in the grieving process. She has lost her mother; her father has lost his wife. If she has children, they have lost a grandmother. The quality of these and other relationships may have varied dramatically, and the survivors' needs may be quite different.

If the mother was an integral part of her daughter's family life—cooking, caring for children or helping family members get along with each other—then the loss may be crippling for the family as a whole. The child care crisis may threaten the family's financial stability. Rifts among family members may worsen without the matriarchal “glue” that once smoothed them over.

A woman may find her marriage unsettled by the loss, as well. For instance, a common male response to loss is greater involvement in work and other external interests.

A woman more often turns inward. She may struggle through a range of emotions and may, for periods, lose interest in routine or outside interest. She may consider sexual advances by her husband to be intrusive or uncomfortable. And she may resent or feel betrayed by his increased interest in external activities.

Grief has no prescribed timetable; normal mourning moved through endless forms.

Depression, however, is a common health complication among women experiencing loss and should not be ignored. A woman, who feels trapped by the continued intensity of her emotions or stalled in her efforts to progress through the emotional turmoil, should seek help... Regardless of the nature of the loss, it presents and often demands an opportunity for emotional growth and self-knowledge.

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