

Adulthood & Life Milestones:

The Branches, Grief That Grows With You

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The branches of the Grief Tree stretch outward, reaching for new experiences and life milestones. Yet, even as life progresses, the echoes of childhood loss remain. Grief doesn't end; it evolves. Major life events such as graduations, weddings, career achievements, and parenthood often stir feelings of longing, sadness, and even renewed grief for the parent who is no longer there to witness these moments.

Re-Grieving: When Joy and Sorrow Coexist

Re-grieving is the natural process of revisiting unresolved grief at different stages of life. These feelings often emerge during significant transitions, including:

- **Graduations:** A time of celebration that may feel bittersweet without the presence or pride of a lost parent.
- **Weddings and Partnerships:** Moments of love and union can trigger grief over the absence of parental guidance or approval.
- **Parenthood:** Becoming a parent often brings reflections on one's own childhood, highlighting the absence of the parent during this new chapter and the longing for their support.

Ongoing Emotional Impact

These milestones may bring up powerful emotional triggers: feelings of abandonment, sadness, and even anger at the unfairness of the loss. Without healthy outlets, some adults may experience difficulties in their relationships, feelings of isolation during life events, or heightened anxiety when stepping into new roles.

Ways to Support Adults Experiencing Re-Grief

- **Validate Their Experience:** Acknowledge that re-grieving is a normal part of the lifelong grief journey. Simple statements like *“It’s okay to miss them during this time”* can be incredibly comforting.
- **Encourage Meaningful Rituals:** Suggest ways to honor the memory of their parent during milestones—saving a seat at a wedding, lighting a candle, or sharing a special memory during celebrations.
- **Support Storytelling and Reflection:** Encourage adults to share stories about their parent with loved ones, children, or in writing. This keeps their parent’s memory alive and integrated into new chapters.
- **Offer Emotional Support During Transitions:** Check in before and after significant life events. Sometimes, just having someone acknowledge the bittersweet nature of a milestone can ease feelings of isolation.
- **Normalize Mixed Emotions:** Help them understand that it’s possible to feel joy and sadness simultaneously, and that both are valid.