

When an Abusive Parent Passes Worksheet



Losing an abusive parent often creates an existential problem. The survivor is usually left without closure and without any chance of direct processing with the parent in the form of honest conversations. Survivors are often left with an existential silence in the context of compounded grief. We usually need help sorting out our feelings.

Opportunity to write #1

1) What feelings come up for you about the passing of the abusive parent? (sadness, rage, numbness, relief, confusion, comfort, anxiety, disappointment, burden, shame)

2) How do you feel about yourself having those feelings?

3) What does your inner child need from your loving inner adult about making sense of the passing and the feelings that come with it?

The parent's legacy.

Survivors are often left with the wounds of the abusive parent's view of them, such as being the parentified child or scapegoat. These become core beliefs and narratives about ourselves.

In addition, when an abusive parent passes, the truth of who they were and what they were in life often gets fabricated in obituaries and how the family talks about them.

Survivors are often torn between losing their truth and history and being stuck with how the parent parented and how they viewed their surviving child.

Opportunity to write #2

1) How did the deceased parent view you? Did they see you as a disappointment, a resource for themselves only, or did they not take the time to know you at all?

2) How does the extended family or community view you in the passing? How these parties view you can be factual or how your inner child assumes what people think. Might they agree with the parent about who you are? Might they presume you are devastated with grief for not knowing who the parent was or about the abuse? The assumption can be highly triggering and put us on the spot.

3) What is the actual legacy and truth versus what would the parent or family say about all this?

4) Dialogue with your inner child and re-parent them in a conversation about the parent's legacy versus twisting the truth that happens when an abusive parent passes.

Unfinished Business

The passing of an abusive parent often leaves us with only lost opportunities to tell the truth, clear the air, or let them know about the damage. Survivors are often left holding the bag with an unfinished and highly complicated relationship.

The deceased are usually blissfully unaware or willfully ignorant.

In addition, there is often a considerable amount of unfinished business in the developmental years while the survivor was being abused or neglected by the parent.

Opportunity to write #3

1) Write out what you needed to say to the deceased parent, even if you tried in the past. This can be in the form of a long letter or a list of issues. Try not to take care of them and voice this from a place of you coming first.

2) Write out how the unfinished business extends into your life outside the relationship with the deceased parent, like not trusting kindness, projecting onto a partner, or still feeling like.

3) Looking over the list of RRP interventions, what might be helpful to you? Some survivors are highly anxious about a wake where people are not real about the abusive parent. Some survivors feel powerless about the truth being known. Some survivors get stuck wishing that the parent would have changed versus feeling the full impact of what they were in their lives.

Resources

Honest Brutal Obituaries.

- Scathing obituary about wicked, wicked, abusive mother goes viral: **<https://nationalpost.com/news/a-wicked-wicked-witch-scathing-newspaper-obituary-about-abusive-mother-goes-viral>**
- Finally kicked the bucket': Daughter writes brutally honest obituary about dead dad: **<https://youtu.be/ZjpesmH2Zks?si=jBdp9iEGaiFor8kl>**

RRP Interventions

The passing away of the relationship interventions.

- Write a 4-5 page goodbye letter to the abusive parent using a photo and an empty chair. A survivor imagines the abusive parent in the chair with a witness present who also talks to the parent in support of the survivor.
- Symbolically destroying a picture or drawing of the parent in a mock funeral ceremony where the truth is told. Lighting a drawing or object representing the relationship on fire after reading from a statement about who they really were. (like a trueology and not a eulogy)
- Symbolically tying string or yarn to heavy objects representing the connection. The survivor ties the strings to themselves, and the weights represent ideas like:
 - *“chasing your love through performing.”*
 - *“doing things for you, like putting you in an apartment to prevent the shame of having an alcoholic dad.”*
 - *“chasing the possibility that one day, you’ll get healthy and be a parent.”*

The survivor or a supportive witness cuts the strings, freeing them from the connection to the abusive parent - symbolically severing an umbilical cord.

Truth Telling Interventions

1. Create a mock funeral (with something representing a casket) where you tell the truth about the abusive parent as opposed to paying lip service to family and community about who they were.
2. Write your own trueology instead of a eulogy and read it to those in your life who get it (therapist, partner, friends, fellow survivors).
3. Set up several empty chairs representing families who don't get it or still celebrate the abuser and prepare a statement about how they are wrong and why. Think of this as having your day in court emotionally. Having support here is powerful.

Being able to express the feelings left by an abusive deceased parent.

1. Write a list of what your family or community doesn't know about and ignores. Obtain a nerf bat or something to throw, like eggs or plates, and a place where you can get loud and messy, like a garage, basement, or rage room. Hit, smash, or throw an egg as you read what the parent did or was like from your list. It's best to have a witness here and an open mind. This exercise only really works if one vocalizes the upset vs. just saying it internally.
2. Prepare a list of what the abusive parent did as well as the dynamics that still stay with you. Place a picture or xerox of the deceased parent on the wall and cover it with translucent painter's plastic. Mix a batch of joint compound with water to represent slime. Throw handfuls of the slime at the picture, giving the parent back the shame and unfinished business they left you with. Again - it's powerful to have a witness who can remind you of what the parent did and or support you.