

# PARENT STORIES

*From our counsellors*

[www.parentline.org.au](http://www.parentline.org.au)



## “When Love and Crime Collide”

One beautiful Sunday afternoon I was called by a very distressed relative saying that they had been burgled and their home had been trashed. That was the beginning of a nightmarish rollercoaster ride for our extended family. It quickly became apparent that this profound damage had been carried out by a young and much loved member of the family, “Jared”.

All the family’s valuables were stolen, some very well hidden in locations known only to family members: precious heirloom jewellery (of unknown monetary value) forming part of the folklore of our family; computers where we had all watched hours of slideshows of all the children growing and changing... all gone, forever.

***As with most families we have had our ups and downs but the grief associated with this event is in a category all of its own.***

As with most families we have had our ups and downs but the grief associated with this event is in a category all of its own. That someone you love could act in such a way, to hurt you so greatly is painfully hard to believe, let alone accept. The sadness that a child you have known their whole life, has taken a path so far from the hopes you had for them is overwhelming.

The damage done was so vast; repairing those things that can be repaired is slow. Many of the stolen things are irreplaceable. It is difficult to begin to heal, as new traumas are added with the discovery of something else missing or another bureaucratic struggle.

Months down the track the trauma continues. Parallel with the endless negotiations with insurance companies and police, there are the painful negotiations as the person responsible is arrested, sentenced and enters the juvenile justice system.

Our grief is worsened by other people’s judgement. Some friends think we are being too harsh; others think we are too lenient. Those in the middle of this situation see that we are doing the best we can in a painful position.

Our family was united in our decision that none of us could have the person responsible live with them at this time. The intervention they required now was beyond us. Juvenile Justice workers regularly encourage us to change our minds. Where they see a first time offender who could now turn around, we see all the avenues of help that were offered and exhausted over many years.

***Surround yourself  
with people that you  
feel understand...***

At times Jared seemed so responsive and we would think "Finally! He's through this stage". In the months leading up to this crime, things appeared to be the best they had been in years: Jared was communicative and willing to participate in family life. This made the loss of hope even greater.

I do not know where my relationship with young Jared will go from here. I hope he gets the help he needs for a better life. At this point I cannot imagine what my role in that life will be. It will certainly be vastly different from the role I once played: one weekend's behaviour changed that.

I do not know how our story will end but I can share what I have found useful, for others who experience something similar.

Recognise that this is pure grief. The child you knew and loved is behaving in an unrecognisable manner, so you grieve the child you lost. You also grieve the child you thought they would become. When we hold newborns we begin imagining them as adults and what lies ahead of them. When their path drastically changes we grieve the loss of those dreams.

Surround yourself with people that you feel understand. Grief is very isolating, so often we feel no one understands. Minimise your contact with people who make you feel worse, no matter how well intentioned they may be.

When grieving, nurture all your senses to encourage healing. This can be as simple as going for a walk, which (apart from the benefit of exercise) feeds your senses of sight, sound and smell. Remember the sense of touch. In the words of Princess Diana "Hugs are mighty powerful things".

***When you find it  
difficult to accept  
help, remember  
that you would do  
it for them.***

Fill your life with the small pleasures: a cup of tea with a friend; really watching the sunset. Focus on these occasions while they are happening, so you can try to enjoy them to the maximum. All the decisions to be made and

the work to be done will still be there when you return to them, but your ability to deal with them will be greater if you give yourself these small respites.

We often fear we are going mad when we are in such emotional pain; when we find ourselves doing things like putting the kettle in the fridge. When our brains are trying to process a trauma there is not as much space left for the everyday things. Where there are lots of decisions to be made and facts to gather, write them down. Even if you normally have a great memory for details, at times of stress this ability will be reduced - use calendars and notebooks, reminders.

My last suggestion would be to accept offers of help. Delegate tasks to others where you can accept. People are only offering because they want to do something, and sometimes practical help is easier to offer than emotional support. When you find it difficult to accept, remember that you would do it for them. Often families work as a unit, so one person may have a good day while another is having a really bad day, and at other times the roles reverse.

Life is full of ups and downs. Some of those downs can come from within the family, which adds a different dimension to the pain. It is a different kind of grief but it is grief nevertheless. Like with any grief it changes over time and there can be healing, even when you fear your heart was forever broken.