IV. FINDINGS

The findings in each main category are reported on separately. Within each of these sections, I report on similarities as well as on differences between mother- and father-headed families, and on how these patterns changed over the course of the study. Notable changes over time are pointed out throughout categories, which means that the time factor is addressed only when changes over time were apparent. Differences between the mother- and the father-headed group appeared very striking in some regards, but there were also a number of interesting similarities. Therefore I felt that, in order not to distort the picture in one way or the other, it was important to treat similarities and differences equally.

To introduce into the families' experience, I describe the circumstances surrounding the loss, addressing the time before the death. After that, all following sections deal with the first two years after the loss. I begin with family members' reports of what the loss means for them. Then follow the sections on the themes Connectedness within and outside the family, Family communication, Being in touch with each other, and Maintaining continuity in family life. Next, I delineate different aspects of families' accommodation to loss and the life changes involved. Finally, I provide a summary of the most important findings with regard to similar and different patterns in mother- and father-headed families.

While reporting on the findings that emerged from the qualitative analysis of the interview materials, I try to stay close to participants reports to draw a picture of their experience as grounded in the data as possible[6]. To provide an additional perspective on these findings, I present results from Repeated Measures ANOVA's with gender of the parent as a group factor, conducted on a cohesion-scale and several outcome measures (see section 3 on Connectedness within the family, and section 8 on Accommodation to loss). Both qualitative and quantitative findings will be discussed on the background of previous research and theory in a subsequent section.

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[6]Quotes from interviews are marked with the identification codes that form the structure of the database (see section 2.2.4 on Computerized coding). For a basic desription of the subsample of the Harvard Child Bereavement Study on which the findings presented in the followig sections are based see the tables 1 and 2.

1. Circumstances Surrounding the Loss

There is common consensus in the literature that circumstances surrounding the death, such as course of illness and expectedness of death, are likely to influence the grieving process (e.g., Rando, 1993; Sanders, 1981). Earlier findings from the Harvard Child Bereavement Study, based on the larger sample, also show the important role of these contextual factors (Silverman & Worden, 1993). To delineate the particular situation of the ten families in the present subsample prior to death, this section addresses the History of illness, and families' focus on survival in the face of an impending death.

History of illness. In the five mother-headed families, the deceased father had been ill with cancer for a period of five to 12 months, except for one case in which the father died after five weeks of illness. In the father-headed group of five families, the deceased mother had been ill with cancer for four years or more, apart from one mother who had been diagnosed and had died within two months. Regardless of these differences in length of illness, the common theme reported in both groups was that the dying person had suffered a great deal. Parents as well as children's reports clearly showed that the period of illness had weighed heavily on them, and that living with these memories was a struggle. When asked what stands out most for them about the time of illness, the surviving parents talked about the pain and the mental and physical suffering that their spouse went through. Example statements made by different mothers and fathers were:

"I think it was mental torture" (1000T1).

"How sick he was, the loss of dignity he had to go through" (5300T3).

"The needless suffering in the end" (1400T1).

Similarly, most of the 25 children reported that the suffering of the deceased parent stood out most in their minds. An 11-year old girl said: "I don't like to remember the pain she went through" (4001T2). Although children in both, the mother- and the father-headed group expressed statements of this kind, it seems important to note that all but one of the families who lost a mother had experienced a much longer illness than families who lost a father.

As Rando (1993) pointed out, a lengthy illness is often followed by a state of complete exhaustion among the surviving family members after the death. In some of the father-headed families, it appeared that resources had been taxed to the limits even before the loss. Children in these families said that they had found dealing with the illness and their dying parent too difficult, and that they had tried to get away from it. For example, an 18-year old girl (5804T1)

recalled how she had to watch her mother's decline, and how much the illness had bothered her. During this time, she ran away from home, got suspended from school and got involved with drugs. These kinds of responses were not reported in mother-headed families. Thus, the aspect of a possible depletion of resources and its impact on the accommodation process, especially in the father-headed group, has to be kept in mind when assessing how families dealt with their daily life after the loss.

Focusing on survival. Despite the fact of the long illness and impending death, all families focused on the possible survival of the dying parent. For example, one widow described how she had believed in survival until the end: "I actually thought he was going to make it, only because I couldn't imagine the possibility of him not. And, I think he felt the same way, that he was going to make it" (1800T1). Statements of this kind clearly contradict the notion of "anticipatory grief" (e.g., Rando, 1993). Proponents of this concept belief that a death following a long illness is somehow easier to deal with than an unexpected death because the grief reaction is assumed to be already past its peak by the time bereavement actually occurs (Lundin, 1984). In other words, grieving has started earlier. This also implies the assumption that the attachment to the deceased already starts to loosen before the death (Bowlby, 1979).

While it certainly makes sense to assume that, during a long illness, certain adjustments occur already during the course of illness, and certain preparations can be made, grieving really does not seem to set in until after the death. Based on an early study of widowhood, Silverman (1972) even talked about the impossibility of anticipatory grief. Parkes and Weiss (1983) maintained that forewarning may not reduce the magnitude of grief but that it does seem to permit some anticipatory preparations. However, even these preparations may occur to a very limited extent, if the main focus is survival. While some family members in the present subsample of the Harvard Child Bereavement Study had expected the death for a while, there still seemed to be a sense of not being prepared[7]. For example, one mother who had anticipated the death of her husband for several months stated: "you're never ready for it" (5200T2). In a similar vein, children described how their parents' lengthy illness hadn't really prepared them for the actual death. As an 11-year old boy reported:

> "I knew she was going to die, but you never think she's going to die. You try to
> prepare yourself but you are not, you really don't think she'll die" (5801T1).

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[7]The subcategory Expectedness of death was integrated into this section because it seemed that the role of anticipation can only be understood in the context of families' focus on survival.

Often, the impending death had not been explicitly talked about. For example, one father recalled: "we tried to spare them the overall problems. Maybe I should have let them know a little bit earlier that we were in the final stages" (7300T3). This reluctance to talk about the impending death and the general feeling of being unprepared, even in the case of a long period of anticipation, appeared to be linked to the strong focus on survival that existed in these families. It is impressive to see how much hope can remain against all evidence. For example, one widower remembered, four months after the loss:

"Subconsciously I knew it all along. But I never related to it. I knew the first time I heard that the breast cancer had nesticized to the bone. I knew that that was it. What time frame that would entail, I was *very optimistic* that it would be as long as possible. But I have to say, as soon as she quit working, I knew that was it. I was *still hopeful* that the doctors might be wrong, because they had been wrong in the past. I was *hoping for the best*. I knew she would suffer longer than what they expected because *they had no idea of her strength.* I knew that nobody had ever been cured of bone cancer, but I also knew that should she find a courageous doctor who had the courage to experiment - that *she might be a survivor*" (4000T1).

This family knew that the death was close, but that did not take away the hope they had until death actually occurred. The emerging phenomenon was that family members did not begin to say goodbye to their loved one, as long as there was the tiniest chance of survival, even if this had required a miracle. It is interesting that, while families who lost a mother had dealt with a much longer illness than families who had lost a father, this difference did not seem to influence how prepared family members felt for the death, or to what extent they focused on the survival of the ill parent. In the same way as the father quoted above, mothers described how they kept up hope and optimism. For example, one mother said, four months after the death of her husband:

"Everyday we hoped for a miracle. I think that the fact that he didn't think he was going to die is what kept us all surviving...he was always very optimistic, and I think that was the best way for us" (5200T1).

Thus, focusing on survival was also described as approach to find enough strength to go through the time of illness. In this way, it can be understood as a coping strategy that was established to focus on the matter of highest priority at the time, which was dealing with the illness and its implications. Since all resources were needed for this investment in the living, preparing for the loss, for instance by talking about the impending death, was difficult to accomplish. As a result, it seems that the actual death required a drastic shift in coping orientation, from a focus on survival toward a grappling with the meaning and implications of this loss.

2. Meaning of the Loss

An insightful dimension to begin with in trying to understand the implications of this loss is how family members described what was lost. Mothers and fathers expressed that, with the death, they lost a partner and a companion. What did it mean for them to lose a companion? Mothers described this loss in terms of their missing someone to talk with, someone to make plans and decisions with, someone to share the load, or to assume the leadership role in the family. For example, one mother said four months after the death of her husband: "he was always there to take the load and I'd be there to go along with him" (5200T1). Another mother reported: "I really miss having a partner. I miss someone to make decisions with. We did a lot together" (5300T1). Fathers talked about the loss of a mother for their children and the loss of a future with their wife after the children have grown up. One father talked about the "lack of a mother for my teenage daughters" (7300T3). Another father reported, one year after the loss:

> "When I see older couples I think of them as having been together for 30 years, I do experience a sense of loss. I'm envious of that couple for something that I looked forward to" (4000T2).

Thus, mothers seemed to focus more on the day to day activities parents share in a family. Fathers talked about this as well, but they framed their thought more in terms of a bigger picture and in more abstract terms, such as the loss of a mother or future together.

Children, regardless of the gender of their surviving parent, talked about the loss of a parent to take care of them. For example, a 14-year old girl described what she was missing, two years after the death of her father: "just to have another parent, to always have a parent around" (5302T3). However, in father-headed families this sense of loss took on a different quality. These children talked about the loss in terms of losing their teenage time, loss of childhood, loss of emotional support, and loss of being a family. Four months after the death, an 18-year old girl said: "I feel like I didn't have a teenage life" (5804T1). This clearly was a situation where a lengthy period of illness, four years of cancer, had affected family life long before the actual death because the girls' statement seems to refer to a loss that she had experienced over years. But similar statements were made by other children, looking back on the first two years of bereavement (see table 8).

Table 8: Children's statements describing what the loss of their parent meant to them

A 12-year old girl talked about:	"The loss of my childhood, I had to worry about things at a time when I shouldn't have" 0402T3).
An 11-year old girl explained why she wanted her mother back:	"That I would have someone to talk to when things go wrong, like talk about personal things, if I ever got pregnant. She would understand more than anyone else" (1401T3).
A 15 year old boy said:	"I wish she was still around, to spend time with her, talk with her" (1402T3).
A 16-year old girl described what it would be like if her mother was back:	"We'd be a family again, and do family stuff" (7302T3).

Although the loss of a partner and parent was the common main loss for everyone, statements like the above did not come up in interviews with children of mother-headed families at all. Thus, children seemed to be facing a different set of problems depending on which parent died. In the following sections, several dimensions of family functioning are looked at in order to help understand what these problems are, and what may cause the different sense of loss in the two groups.

3. Connectedness Within the Family

Since the connectedness within the family the one dimension that is considered most basic for family functioning (Olson, McCubbin, & Barnes, 1983), it seems to be a good starting point for the analysis of family life. A family's connectedness can be reflected in many different facets. Three features that were extracted from the qualitative data were the family members' perception of being connected with each other, of getting along, and of being supportive. An additional source of information about connectedness within the family was provided through scores from a quantitative measure of family cohesion (FACES III; Olson, McCubbin, & Barnes, 1983). Repeated measures analysis with gender of parent as group factor, conducted on these cohesion scores, yielded no time but a marginal group effect (F (1, 8) = 4.28; p = .072). This suggests that while cohesion scores did not significantly change over time, there was a difference between the mother- and father-headed group, in the sense that mothers gave higher scores on this scale than fathers[8]. What the trends in means indicate is that cohesion gradually decreased in mother-

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[8]There are two reasons why it seems legitimate and worthwile to look at the trends of these means despite the lack of significance. First of all, the small sample of ten families could be one of the reasons why these results did not reach significance. Secondly, because of the explorative nature of this study, a generalization of findings to

headed families. In father-headed families, the trend was an initial decrease, followed by an increase, so that by the second year of bereavement, differences between the two groups disappeared. This was generally not inconsistent with what family members reported in terms of their Perceived closeness, Getting along, and Being supportive.

Perceived closeness. In both groups, parents talked about a decrease in closeness at some point. However, the two groups differed with regard to their perception of the course of changes in closeness. Some mothers felt that there was increased closeness at first, but then some decrease, which they attributed to the children's growing up:

> One mother said, a year after the loss: "Of course, they don't want me around anymore, they're into their friends and what their friends do" (1800T1).
>
> Another mother reported, two years after the loss: "Now that everyone is getting a little older, we all go separate ways" (5800T3).

In father-headed families, the reversed pattern seemed to emerge. Fathers reported a decrease in closeness first, and by the second year of bereavement more of an increase back toward being a family. One father concluded, two years after the loss:

> "I was doing my thing, they were doing things, it was a great separation, we just went different ways, it was scrambled back then. Everything was just a mess .... we are more like a family now" (5800T3).

A possible interpretation for this different development is that, while family members in mother-headed pulled it together at first, things were falling apart in the father-headed families. Then, over time, the situation in both groups normalized. This meant for the mother-headed families that children turned a little more to the outside in the process of growing up. Whereas father-headed families went from being fairly disconnected to building more of a connection with each other. This makes sense considering that children in this group stated that they had been closer to the deceased than to the surviving parent. One year after the loss, some of these children even said that they did not feel close to the surviving parent, and that they were closer to someone in the extended family (e.g., 5801T2). This was inconsistent with their fathers' assessment of closeness within the family, in the sense that fathers were often not aware of their

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the general population is neither appropriate nor the purpose of this analysis. Rather, analyzing the quantitative measures available from the Child Bereavement Study serves to assess and interpret the patterns emerging from the qualitative analysis of the interview data.

children's perception[9]. However, in line with the observation that cohesion increased in father-headed families over time, lack of closeness was no longer reported two years after the loss. Reflecting on the first two years of bereavement, some fathers realized that the weakened state of closeness in the family had been due to their being immersed in their own grief. This was demonstrated in a statement one father made, two years postloss, as advice to other widow(er)s: "from day 1 try to be close to your kids, try to help them out, I was so grieved and full of self pity, I couldn't be there for them" (5800T3).

Getting along. While conflicts among family members were reported in all families, the source and nature of these frictions appeared to be different in the two groups. Mothers perceived the conflicts they had with their children as pretty normal. For example, one mother described the frictions with her children, one year after the loss, as "usual teenage crap" (1000T2). Another mother said about conflicts with her children, two years after the loss: "It's nothing that's not normal. Is there any such thing as a parent and a child who don't have any?" (5300T3). Conflicts among siblings were characterized in a similar way, as one mother described it, two years after the loss: "They have their days. She thinks he's spoiled and he thinks he's spoiled" (5200T3).

Father-headed families, on the other hand, seemed to deal with more serious conflicts. Two of the fathers (5800T2, 0400T2) even had their oldest daughters move out for a while because the tensions became unbearable for everybody. The most frequent source of conflict in these families seemed to be that the older sibling tried to parent, which the younger ones did not appreciate. For example, one father, four months postloss, described the tensions between his children as "you are my sister not my mother kind of thing" (0400T1). A 16-year old boy, one year after the loss, described the problem of dealing with his younger siblings in a similar way: "I try to help, maybe I am doing the wrong thing...we end up fighting" (5803T2). Thus, while in mother-headed families, conflicts were described as the regular frictions around teenage issues and sibling teasing, there seemed to be some additional issues in father-headed families: Conflicts centered around role struggles among siblings when one of them tried to take over parenting roles.

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[9]Ohannessian, Lerner, Lerner, and von Eye (1995) reported from a study addressing discrepancies between adolescents and their parent's perception of family functioning that children perceived the level of cohesion as lower than did their parents. In the Harvard Child Bereavement Study, the cohesion scale was only administered to parents not to children. But the qualitative findings indicate that discrepancies of this kind were more likely to occur in father- than in mother-headed families.

Being supportive. In both groups, family members expressed a sense of mutual support within the family. All of them reported feeling supported by at least one other family member. Interestingly, mothers as well as fathers not only gave but also received a great deal of support from their children. For example, two mothers reported perceiving their children as important source of support, two years after the loss:

"I try to be there for them, and really, they are always there for me" (5300T3).

"Just that they are there and I don't have to be alone" (4800T3).

Similarly, a father, four months after the loss, described the efforts of his 16 year old son to comfort him: "When I break down he'll say, don't worry dad" (5800T1). Thus, many of the parents perceived their children as helpful. In some cases, it is unclear to what extent a parent received more support from the children than he or she gave back to them.

While this seemed to be the case in both groups, the phenomenon that a child felt more supported by a sibling than by the surviving parent appeared to be more prevalent in father-headed families. Children in these families often referred to a sibling rather than to the surviving parent, when being asked who in the family they perceive as supportive. For instance, an 11-year old boy talked about the support he was receiving from his older sister, four months after the loss: "She tells me that she will always be there for me no matter how down we get...that makes me feel good" (5801T1).

As noted above, children in father-headed families also talked about the loss of their parent as a loss of emotional support. However, while children in the father-headed group may have felt less supported by their surviving parent than children in the mother-headed group, it should be noted that in both groups, there were times in the first year after the loss, during which family members did not feel able to give comfort and support to each other. Two years after the loss, family members retrospectively expressed that there were times when they did not have any ways of comforting each other. As one mother put it: "I don't think there was anything" (1800T3). This emotional state is also very well demonstrated in the advice that a father had for professionals who work with bereaved families: "There should be a group meeting with kids their own age immediately, to discuss problems, to learn to let it out. The remaining parent is too screwed up to be there" (1400T3). These statements suggests that the ability to be supportive of each other tends to be limited at certain points after the loss, which points to the importance of having access to support from the outside to fall back on.

4. Connectedness Outside the Family

There is strong evidence that social support can buffer negative effects of bereavement (Sanders, 1993). While a certain degree of social integration seems to be a precondition for the availability of support, a person with a high level of social involvement does not necessarily feel supported by this social network (Belle, 1982). To understand what a social network provides, or what kind of network may be needed in order to feel supported, it seems important to look at both dimensions.

Social integration. Mothers reported socializing with the extended family as well as with friends. Some even engaged in more socializing since the loss. As one mother described, a year after the death of her husband:

> "My social life is better (laughs). I do a lot of social life as far as, I enjoy dancing
> and so I do that more" (1800T2).

Dating did not seem to be a prevalent way of socializing among mothers. At least in the present subsample of the Harvard Child Bereavement Study, only one mother was dating by the second year of bereavement. In contrast, all fathers were dating at that point, and they did not report having a best friend or group of friends apart from their girlfriend. For example, one father, described his social life as being centered around his new partner, a year after the loss: "it feels good to have company again because I was really lonely" (5800T2). Some fathers talked about meeting people regularly at sports and other activities, and others about keeping close contact with their wife's friends. Social integration seemed more difficult for them than for the mothers, often because their wives had kept their social lives going. This finding supports the conclusion from previous research that men tend to have fewer social contacts to rely on (e.g., Levinson, 1978; Stroebe & Stroebe, 1983; Weiss, 1990). For example, one father (0400T3) remarked that his wife used to be more social, and another father (4000T3) mentioned that it was thanks to his wife's initiative that they had a pretty active and regular social life.

Regardless of the gender of the surviving parent, most of the children reported having at least one best friend who they were seeing regularly. Some children mentioned that they were spending more time with friends since the loss, because they often had to stay home with the ill parent. As a 14-year old girl explained, four months after the death of her mother: "because when my mom was sick I had to stay with her" (7301T1). Taken together, it seems that while there was an increase in socializing among some of the mothers and children, social integration (apart from dating) appeared more difficult for fathers after the loss. The only significant

addition in terms of social contacts that was reported by fathers was a girlfriend. This raises the question of what implications the difference in social integration had for the availability and perception of social support.

Social support. In line with social integration, there seemed to be some differences between mothers and fathers in terms of whom they turned to and whom they leaned on most. Mothers reported turning to friends and mainly leaning on one best friend. Most mothers actively sought out support of some kind from the beginning. For example, one mother reported reaching out to all possible places such as support groups and a counselor, four months after the loss: "just to know there was someone there, if and when I felt I needed it or the kids did. I go to whoever thing is going to be able to help me" (1800T1).

On the contrary, fathers rarely reported leaning on friends at first. Most often fathers said that they mainly relied on themselves, their mother or sister, and once they had a new partner, on their girlfriends. One father described the role of his girlfriend, one year after the loss: "Probably the biggest thing that helped me was last summer. She's really a wonderful person and she helped me an awful lot, very supportive" (5800T2). But finding a new partner to lean on was not the only change among fathers with regard to support. Over time, they increasingly engaged in mobilizing support from other sources as well. One father who had reported mostly leaning on himself, four months after the death of his wife, started seeking out therapy and a support group within the first year of bereavement. Two years after the loss he expressed how helpful this had been for him: "I just needed to talk it out. I could air things, get deeper into my past...they understood really well" (1400T3). Another father seemed to go through a similar learning process. In the first interview, he talked about dealing with everything just by himself: "I'm stubborn, I'm macho. I feel it is a personality thing. I have to live with it and solve it myself" (7300T1). Two years later, he had a different attitude towards needing help: "don't be afraid if you need extra help, seek it" (7300T3). Thus, while the fact that fathers had less access to social support than did mothers, this difference really seemed to diminish over the two-year course of the study.

Children of mother- and father-headed families did not appear to be different with regard to their perception of social support. Adults outside the family often offered support in the form of talking about the loss, but most children either did not respond to these offers, or flat-out said that they perceived it as intrusive. A 14-year old girl argued, two years after the loss:

"They could have kept out of my business. The only reason why I didn't go to them was because they were pushing themselves on me and I didn't want to hear it from them. My teacher was like 40 when her mother died. She kept telling me

she knew what I was going through and I got so fed up with it. I guess her mother died of cancer too but her mother was like 70. If you ask me, there is a big difference between a 70-year old and someone who is in their 40's die. I think that's a big difference. If someone is 14 years old comparing it to somebody who is like 40 years old, having their mother or father die, I feel that's totally different" (1001T3).

One reason for her not wanting to talk was that she felt not understood, and that her feelings were belittled by the comparison to the teacher's loss. Instead, she suggested to those who offer support to bereaved children:

"You know not to push yourself on them. Let them know that you are there but don't say it so much that they will be like "Oh I have to go talk to her now, I have to go tell her how my father's doing or how my mother's doing" (1001T3).

Similar advice was given by other children of different ages, two years after the loss:

A 12-year old girl: "Be nice to them but leave them alone if they need it" (5302T3).

A 16-year old girl: "Just let them know that you're there for them, don't expect that they're gonna come running to you and tell you all about it. It's personal stuff and it's personal feelings and. If the child wants to talk be there, and if not just let him know that you'll support them and you'll be there for them regardless" (7301T3).

Whether or not children talked to their friends about the deceased, or in which way they felt supported by them seemed to be related to age rather than to their own gender or the gender of the parent. Most children claimed not to derive support from their friends through talking about the deceased. This was especially the case among the younger children (age 10-14). Those children who did talk with their friends about the deceased were older than 14. For example, a 16-year old boy, four months after the loss, talked about what he sometimes shared with his friends: "Stuff I recall, that I did with Dad" (5303T1). In contrast to what one would expect based on the literature on boys' and girls' friendships (e.g., Gilligan, Lyons, & Hamner, 1989), there did not seem to be a difference between boys and girls in this regard. Both boys and girls reported the following reasons for not talking to their friends about the deceased (see table 9):

Table 9: Reasons that children report for not wanting to talk about the deceased with friends

People wouldn't understand anyway	An 11-year old girl, two years postloss: "They say I know how you feel because my grandmother died but that is not the same, you are closer to your parents than to your grandparents I think" (4001T3).
It would make everybody uncomfortable	A 15-year old boy, one year postloss: "Neither of us want to, like, they never mention it. Because they know that it makes me sad, and they don't really, I doubt that they even feel comfortable, they might think that it's really none of their business" (1002T2).
It wouldn't help anyway	A 12-year old girl, two years postloss: "It wouldn't help, it doesn't matter if we talk" (5301T3).
It just doesn't come up	A 15-year old boy, two years postloss: "It never comes up, if it would, we'd talk" (1802T3).

Interestingly, most of the children who did not talk about the deceased with their friends still perceived them as very helpful. For example, an 11 year old boy explained, four months after the loss: "it's just usually not the subject" (1801T1). At the same time he reported: "they are all helpful". Some children understood that their friends' way of being supportive was to treat them normally. This was usually appreciated, as described by a 12 year old boy, four months after the loss: "they just act normally, play games at recess so it wouldn't bother me" (4002T1).

In sum, the feeling that no one understands was one of the reasons why some children did not want to talk about the deceased. For many of them, however, talking about the loss did not seem to be the most central need. Apparently, they could feel supported in other ways such as appreciating a friend's just being there. Furthermore, these children felt most reluctant to talk when they perceived the initiating person (usually an adult) as forcing the topic on them. Thus, the point was not that they were generally opposed to talking about the loss. Rather, they couldn't deal with the approach that some people, especially adults, tended to take when initiating such a conversation. This pattern also seemed to characterize the communication within the families.

5. Family Communication

The topic of talking about the deceased had been addressed in an earlier analysis of the Harvard Child Bereavement Study (Nickman, Silverman, & Normand, 1998). The authors were interested in parents' contribution to their children's ability to form an inner representation of the deceased parent. They found that in this context interactive processes in the family played a crucial role. This means that talking about the deceased served as a central way of building an inner representation of the deceased[10]. While the importance of giving the deceased a place in family life in this way seems self-evident, these earlier findings as well as the current analysis, show that to what extent children feel comfortable talking about the deceased is related to how the surviving parent approaches this topic.

The main picture that emerged from the present subsample of the Harvard Child Bereavement Study was that the surviving parents, like the adults outside the family, tried to talk about the deceased and that children tended to block this attempt. For example, one mother said, four months after the loss: "It's easy for me, but I know the kids don't want to talk about it sometimes" (1000T1). This was confirmed by her 13-year old daughter stating: "I don't talk to anyone. I could but I don't like to" (1001T1). Similarly, her older brother (age 16) explained, two years after the loss:

> "She likes to talk about it (the loss) to me but I really don't...I don't feel like I need to because I can solve it out. I think about it to myself, I think about it so I don't really talk to her that much about it. Once in a while she tries to get me to talk about it but I really don't like to. I just think it out for myself" (1002T3).

However, as pointed out in the context of social support, children did not appear to be generally opposed to the idea of talking about the deceased parent. Rather, some ways of talking about the deceased seemed easier for them than others. A 15-year old girl expressed this very clearly, four months after the loss of her mother:

> "If we're talking about a certain vacation, then it's good. If we talk about, well she wouldn't let you do this, it's neutral. If we talk about how much we miss her, then it's depressing. You know, it really depends on what we're talking about" (4003T1).

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[10]Since Nickman et al. (1998) focused on parental attitudes and behaviors that were helpful or not helpful to children's construction of a connection to the deceased parent, issues of communication were touched on, but they were not addressed in greater depth. Thus, the findings reported on in this section lend support to the patterns described in this earlier paper, and further elaborate on them.

To illustrate the different ways in which families did or did not talk about the deceased, table 10 summarizes the number of families, in which at least two family members made statements representing each subcategory at the different time points.

Talking about the deceased was most often done by *sharing memories* or by *talking about what the deceased would do or say* in certain situation. For example, a mother described, one year after the death of her husband, how they shared memories: "we talk about what a good person he was ... I tell my son, that's what Dad would do, and he enjoys it" (1000T2). Often, talking about what the deceased would do was the much preferred topic because most families had very painful memories of the period of illness. A 12-year old boy, four months after the loss, explained why they tried not to bring the topic up: "no one in the family likes to bring it up ... even though she's always in mind, bad thoughts just stuck in our heads" (5801T1).

Table 10: Different ways of talking about the deceased reported by family members of mother- and father-headed families at all three time points

	Mother-headed families	Father-headed families
Sharing memories		
T1	3	1
T2	4	3
T3	3	4
Sharing feelings		
T1	0	0
T2	0	2
T3	0	0
Talking about what the deceased would do		
T1	2	2
T2	5	1
T3	3	1
Using humor		
T1	1	0
T2	1	0
T3	1	1
Using the deceased as a moral rock		
T1	1	0
T2	1	0
T3	0	2

Other ways of talking about the deceased that were reported only in few families were *Using humor*, and using the deceased *as a "moral rock"*. An example for using humor was one family in which the deceased father's obsession with table manners turned into a family joke. Two years after the loss, the 18-year old son described: "we often refer to him in a humorous way ... like his thing with table manners" (5303T3). References to the deceased in terms of approval were reflected in statements such as a mother's commenting on her son's report cards, four months after the loss: "what do you think Dad would have thought" (1800T1). In general, negative references were more frequent than positive ones, but this did not seem to be disliked by any of the family members.

The absolute least favored and the most blocked way of talking about the deceased was *sharing feelings.* As expressed by a 14-year old girl, two years after the death of her mother: "I'd rather keep it to myself" (0402T3). One mother, a year after the loss, noted about her children that "they don't tend to talk about feelings too much with me". Several children clearly stated that they perceived their parent as "harping on feelings", and that they felt bothered by it. For

example, a 13-year old girl said about her mother: "she always harps on it, that gets me sort of irritated, that she keeps repeating it" (1001T1). This is the same sort of complaint that children brought up when describing unhelpful social support.

As the adults outside the family, surviving parents seemed not always aware of how little their children wanted to talk about feelings. Those who appeared aware of these difficulties were also the ones who had a hard time sharing feelings themselves. As one father reported, a year postloss: "I try not to because I don't know what to say. If I'm in a foul mood, I don't want to bring them down by talking about it" (5800T2). This statement reflects an effort to protect his children from being confronted with emotions that he felt were too overwhelming for them. The fear that talking about feelings would exceed what one could bear emotionally was also expressed by children. Reasons that they reported for not wanting to share feelings are summarized in table 11.

While communication patterns in mother- and father-headed families were similar in many regards (e.g., children were reluctant to share feelings in both groups), there were also some interesting differences: Parents' harping on feelings as a reason for not wanting to *share feelings* was only brought up by children of mother-headed families. Although most of the children in father-headed families blocked sharing feelings as well, they did not seem to feel as overloaded by it. Furthermore, sharing feelings among siblings as satisfying alternative to talking with a parent was only reported in father-headed families. For example, a 15-year old girl explained, one year after the death of her mother: "I don't talk much with my dad...but it feels ok because I can talk to my sister. She understands because she feels a lot of the same things" (7301T2). Thus, it seems that, after all, there was more sharing feelings whenever the surviving parent was not perceived as forcing this level of talking on the children.

Sharing memories appeared to be more disliked in father- than in mother-headed families at first. Children argued that they did not like it because there were too many bad memories about the time of illness. One reason why this came up more often in father- than in mother-headed families may simply be that these families had dealt with much longer illnesses. However, referring to the deceased became less upsetting over time, in the sense that more positive memories came to mind, and painful memories of a long period of illness attenuated a little. One father reported, a year after the loss: "the illness still haunts me but...last year I only had bad thoughts, now I start to think of the good times sometimes" (5800T2). Children seemed to feel increasingly able to hear other people talk about the deceased and actually enjoyed that. For example, a 12-year old boy who hadn't liked talking about his deceased mother in the

beginning at all, described how talking with his sister made him feel good, one year later: "it makes me feel good. She always recalls funny things, the good moments" (5801T2).

Table 11: Reasons that children report for not wanting to share feelings with their parent

No one understands anyway	An 11-year old boy, four months postloss: "I don't really talk to my father that much because the doesn't really know how I'm feeling ... because he still has a mother" (5801T1).
It is too overwhelming	A 17-year old girl, four months postloss: " I don't think I would. He was as close to her as I was. It would be too emotional" (7302T1)
I just want to think about it by myself	A 16-year old boy, two years postloss: "She likes to talk about it but I really don't, I just like to think it out by myself" (1002T3).

One way of talking about the deceased that was used less in father- than in mother-headed families was *talking about what the deceased would do*. It seemed that there was less creativity in father-headed families in terms of finding such alternative ways of talking about the deceased. This probably was related to a basic aspect of communication that seemed to flow better in mother-headed families: *the general daily life talk*. Children of father-headed families expressed that they just weren't used to talking with their fathers about daily life problems. This is reflected in the following examples:

> An 11-year old girl, four months postloss: "I never talk to him about anything, I never did" (1401T1).

> A 17-year old boy, one year postloss: "I used to come home and talk to her. Now I can't do that. I can talk to my father, but it's just not the same" (5803T2).

While discussing daily life issues occurred less often between parents and children in these families than in mother-headed families, *blowing up* and yelling at each other was a more prevalent way of communicating. Table 12 summarizes the number of families in which at least two family members made statements representing each subcategory at the different time points.

Table 12: Communication in terms of Discussing daily life issues and Blowing up at each other reported by family members of mother- and father-headed families at all three time points.

	Mother-headed families	Father-headed families
Discussing daily life issues		
T1	4	0
T2	3	2
T3	4	4
Blowing up at each other		
T1	0	3
T2	1	4
T3	1	2

Several fathers reported that they tended to yell at their children, especially when trying to discipline them. Children of these families talked about the yelling as well. An 11-year old girl, four months after the loss, described the communication with her father as "he just screams at me all day and gives me lectures" (1401T1). A year later, this father described his tendency to blow up at his children, but he also recognized the necessity to change his behavior: "I get too angry...yell and scream, I know it's not right ... I am working on developing patience" (1400T2). As this statement indicates, fathers realized that the communication between them and their children needed to improve, and they seemed to make an effort in this direction. These efforts appeared to be recognized by their children, as the statement of a 12-year old girl demonstrates: One year after the death, she explained how things between her and her father had changed "we just talk more because I used to talk to my mom about my problems but now I talk to my dad since she is not there" (4001T2). While changes of this kind did occur, it is unclear to what extent the communication between fathers and children turned into something similar to the interaction between mothers and children. What remained for both groups was that there were times or constellations in which not everything could be talked about, and family members depended on their empathic abilities to stay in touch with each other's needs and experiences.

6. Being in Touch with Each Other

Family theorists have pointed out that mutual understanding and a certain level of empathy is crucial to family functioning (Walsh & McGoldrick, 1991). This is a major challenge in bereaved families because dealing with loss can be such a unique experience, and people are often absorbed by their own grief and struggling that there is not much energy left for others (Silverman, Weiner, & El Ad, 1995). The extent to which family members were in touch with

one another seemed to be reflected in their perception of each others' needs, and in how much they were in tune with each others' expectations.

Perception of each other's needs. In general, there seemed to be more of a sense for each other's situation and experience from the beginning in mother- than in father-headed families. Although there often was very little explicit sharing, family members in the mother-headed group had an idea of what's hardest for each other. For example, one mother, four months after the loss, explained why she felt she needed to be home for her children: "They lost somebody too. It was very shaky for them, so I stayed home to let them know that I am there" (1000T1). Her children experienced their mother as being sensitive to their needs, and maybe that enabled them to come up with a considerable degree of sensitivity as well. When asked what he thought was hardest for his mother, her 16-year old son said, two years after the loss: "being by herself, she is kind of lonely" (1002T3). He further suggested that his sister struggled with "probably not having a father figure around".

In the father-headed group the situation was very different. At first, fathers seemed far less in tune with their children than mothers. However, there was a tremendous development over time in terms of getting a better sense for the children's perspectives. Reflecting on the first year of bereavement, some fathers realized that they had been too preoccupied with themselves in the beginning, such as one father who explained:

> "You know I kept thinking of my problem, like I'm losing my wife, not thinking well, they are losing their mother. These things I realized over the past year. And how devastating that must have been that morning when I woke them and said their mother is dead" (5800T2).

Looking back on the first two years of bereavement, he said: "I'm sure they had needs individually but I don't know what they were ... blank" (5800T3). Thus, along with the improving communication between fathers and children, fathers increasingly became aware of their children's needs and problems. This development started out with the recognition that there was a lot they did not know. It seems that this realization created a basis on which fathers could gain a better understanding of their children's experience. Two years after the loss, one father began to grasp some of what his now 17-year old daughter had been and still was going through:

> "She lost her mother and that was it. I didn't know what her needs were. Her needs were basically very female-oriented. She misses her mother, she's hurting deeply but she doesn't show it. She is always ahead of herself, it's getting better, but she was really lost" (4000T3).

Children noticed and acknowledged these changes in their fathers, such as a 14-year old girl who said about her father, one year after the loss: "he's more understanding ... more helpful to us, he tries to help us a lot ... you know, he was going through a tough time himself" (5802T2). It seems that once these children felt better understood by their fathers, they also were more able to see their parent's perspective of the situation. Interestingly, even those fathers who were able to gain a better understanding of their children over time, did not always seem to act on what they saw their children may need (such as being at home and spending more time with them). One father, two years postloss, expressed sympathy for his children:

> "I cannot imagine how anybody can live without the love and support of one's mother. So it's very hard for me to imagine how the kids are adjusting and coping without their mother" (4000T3).

But this insight did not seem to lead him to modify his behavior. At least, he did not appear to see his own role in making the situation for his children better by spending more time with them, in order to compensate for the lack of a mother. His children's situation, he commented with "I find it amazing that they are seemingly doing as well as they are" (4000T3), which really minimized the hard time that they seemed to have. It becomes clear that, despite the positive development described above, fathers had more difficulties recognizing their children's needs than did mothers. This difference between mothers' and fathers' sense for their children's experience was also reflected in the extent to which parents clarified expectations they had for their children.

Perceived expectations. Most children felt that they were expected to behave in certain ways. Examples were being good, not fighting with siblings, helping more around the house, or being more responsible. But these expectations did not necessarily cause discomfort. In mother-headed families, children seemed to be fairly clear about what was expected from them, and they did not perceive these expectations as bothersome. For example, a 14-year old boy, four months after the loss, said about his mother's expectations: "she wants me to be supportive but not over supportive" (1002T1). His 13-year old sister remembered what their mother had said to them before the funeral:

> "If people tell you that you have to be strong for your mother, just brush it off. It's all right if you act like a kid. You don't have to be always big and mature" (1001T1).

At the same time, this mother also had made clear what she expected:

"I know people will be saying that to you, don't listen to them. But show respect, don't be saying 'well my mother can take care of herself'" (1001T1).

Children of father-headed families were often unclear about what was expected from them, and thought that they were expected to take over certain roles than were children of mother-headed families. This was especially the case for older daughters. For example, a 19-year old girl, two years after the loss, felt that she had to be responsible for her siblings, and perceived this as a heavy burden "to be responsible, it's a burden" (0403T3). Her father commented about this by saying: "It was a self imposed burden. I never asked her to. She probably thought I expected her to. I didn't" (0400T3). But apparently he never clarified what the responsibilities should be or should not be. Another girl aged 20, felt also very burdened by being responsible for the family. Two years after the loss, she told the interviewer: "I can't break down now too; I am basically the one comforting everybody and then no one's there for me and I freak out myself" (5804T3). Although these expectations stemmed more from her grandmother than from her father, it remained that he had not addressed this issue with her or given her reassurance that he thought differently about it.

It seems that the existence of expectations was not necessarily problematic in and of itself, but that it was crucial to be in touch with children's perception of what was expected from them. This clearly occurred more in mother- than in father-headed families, which may have contributed to the fact that children of mother-headed families seemed to feel less burdened. Two years after the loss of her husband, one mother articulated this eloquently with her statement on the source of children's worries: "The unknown would do it" (1000T3). This awareness of the detrimental impact of the "unknown" on children, and of the related need for clarity and stability in a time of disruption appeared to be a key factor distinguishing how mothers and fathers dealt with establishing a routine that allowed continuity in home life.

7. Maintaining Continuity in Family Life

It has been suggested that maintaining a sense of continuity and stability in the lives of bereaved children is crucial to good adjustment (Foley Reese, 1982; Siegel, Mesagno, & Christ, 1990). Continuity in family life is something all family members can contribute to by helping to keep up a routine in home life. For the most part, however, continuity depends on the parent's contribution as caretaker. This involves the surviving parent's coping with the role as single parent in dealing with daily home life, and the parenting style that underlies the parent's behaviors and responses (Silverman, 2000).

Structuring home life. In all mother-headed families, the home life routine changed very little. Mothers perceived single parenting as difficult and challenging but not as overwhelming[11]. While the lack of someone to help them make decisions was brought up by some, others reported that decision making had become easier. A year after the death of her husband, one mother reported:

> "I find the taking care of the children better, in the sense that you can make a decision, and when you're a couple, it has to be discussed, and that's good too, but if you don't have it, the other side of it, is that you make the decision and it's made. That's kind of freeing ... There is a benefit making decisions on your own, not having another side to it" (1000T2).

Disciplining the children was reported as a major problem since the role of disciplinarian had been the husbands' task. This is demonstrated in the following statement made by one mother, four months after the loss:

> "I am not crazy about raising 3 kids by myself, I never know whether I am making the right decisions with them. Not so much the girls as with son, curfews and things, how late, where they're going" (5300T3).

Mothers also talked about worries such as getting through financially, repairing the car, doing taxes, and handling insurance. As one mother explained, two years after the loss: "when things go wrong with the house like things breaking down, that really worries me" (5300T3). Regardless of such difficulties, however, these mothers recognized the importance of making an extra effort to maintain their children's accustomed routines, and to reassure them that, to the extent possible, things would not change. Examples for this effort are reflected in the following statements made by different mothers:

> "I told the kids right away that nothing was going to change as far as our life style, and that they could still have their tennis lessons and whatever" (4800T1).

> "I haven't done anything new, I haven't started a job. I just try to maintain and stabilize the home" (1000T2).

> "I tried to keep their lives as normal as possible ... to keep them as comfortable, have them do the same things they did all the time, same friends, so that nothing much would be changed" (1800T2).

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[11]The subcategory Parenting as single parent was integrated into this section because how parents felt about dealing with this task was so closely related to how they structured home life that merging these categories seemed to allow a more coherent report.

Interestingly, stability in home life did not seem to depend on whether or not they had meals together. Meals were eaten together when schedules allowed it. But whenever this was not the case, it did not seem to threaten the family's routine. At least, according to children's perception, nothing had basically changed, such as a 15-year old boy who stated one year after the loss: "we do about the same routine" (1002T2). The main changes they reported were that they had to do some more chores and that the house was quieter.

In father-headed families the whole routine was turned upside down. As one father put it, a year after the loss: "the family unit has been broken. It will take a woman" (1400T2). This statement seems to hit the core of how fathers perceived their role and capacity as single parent, and may explain why children in these families experienced the loss of childhood more acutely. In this context, it is also interesting to note that most of these men had been advised by their wives to remarry after the death so that the children would be taken care of properly. So it seems that fathers' own perception of what they would be able to provide for their children was very much shaped by how their wives had assessed this, or to what extent their wives had believed that they would be able to handle the situation.

What fathers reported as most taxing, and often as overwhelming, was taking over the household, caring for the children, and attending to their problems. One father explained, two years after the loss: "just the everyday chores that she used to do and we have to pick up and handle, such as cleaning the house and doing laundry" (1400T3). It is important to keep in mind that all but one of the fathers had to handle or learn household tasks next to full-time jobs. Therefore, some had to hire a housekeeper, bring in relatives as babysitters, or send children to the grandparents' house for meals. Thus, the circumstances in the mother- and father-headed group were different in several critical regards.

Some of the fathers had taken over certain household tasks during their wives' lengthy illness. So for them, the changes in terms of role distribution were not as abrupt as for other fathers. But the role of single parenting really involved more than that. What appeared to be the key issue was learning to create a home atmosphere and a sense of continuity in family life, which seemed to be very difficult for all fathers. They tried to keep up the routine by making up a lot of rules about how to behave, insisting on coming together at dinner times, and finding ways of distributing the housework[12]. Four months after the loss, one father wondered why his children were not willing to conform:

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[12]Repeated measures ANOVA with gender of parent as group factor, conducted on adaptability scores (FACES III) neither indicated changes in adaptability over time nor group differences between mother- and father-headed families. There was no variability in these scores, which suggests that the scale did not detect the differences in terms of families' ability to adjust rules, relationships, and role structure that emerged from the interviews.

"Impressing upon my daughter, who felt that once her mother was gone, she'd have total independence, impressing the fact upon her that at 4:30 at night, I want everybody at home because we eat together every night. This isn't a revolving door, you come in at certain times, you go to bed at certain times, same old shtick. Impressing on them that it has to continue, the same as it was before, only minus one" (4000T1).

At the same time, this father was often not at home himself. Next to his regular job (night shifts), he was involved in a number of voluntary activities during the day. Another father tried to get his children to cooperate in terms of chores by threatening to throw them out for lack of cooperation. His 11-year old son commented, four months after the loss: "Since she died we have our jobs and if we don't do them we have to leave" (5801T1).

Both fathers gave up on their attempt to establish a routine by the second year of bereavement. One of them argued: "I've kind of given up coming home from work and cooking and they go out and don't want to eat until later ... they're too busy to be here, or they don't want to be here" (5800T3). It seems that he began to realize that there may be a reason why his children did not want to be at home, but that he did not follow up on this realization to the point of recognizing what his children may need in order to feel more comfortable at home.

Thus, fathers requested something from their children (e.g., showing up for meals), rather than providing something for them (e.g., spending as much time with their children as possible). In general, fathers seemed to sometimes overestimate their contribution to the family routine or the time they actually spent at home. One father, for example, did not report any major difficulties in keeping up a routine, and he thought it was pretty stable. However, two years after the loss, his 19-year old daughter had a different perspective:

"My sister is just been left far too much alone for her own good, it's not my father's fault, I mean, if my mother was still alive, I'm sure she'd be home a lot more, cooking dinner, being here a lot more. But my father has to go all the way to work. He does a lot of softball, and at night he works at a bar. I mean, he has to do all that ... and I'm at school, so as a result, she's by herself a lot" (7302T3).

While this father found the family routine comfortable for himself, his daughters mainly felt his absence. In sum, the main difference between mother- and father-headed households seemed to be that mothers provided stability in the home and reassured their children that life would continue, while fathers engaged more in setting rules. This pattern appeared to reflect two distinct styles of establishing a daily family routine: a nurturing and an administrative style (Silverman, 1999; personal communication). Mothers' efforts to provide continuity represented more of a *nurturing style*. Fathers, on the other hand, acted in a more *administrative style,* in the

sense that they tried to organize and regulate the household as if they were dealing with a work surrounding in which cooperation among coworkers is expected.

This was also reflected in children's perception of their own role in the household, in the way that children in father-headed families described their involvement as more of a serious responsibility than did children in mother-headed families. Especially the oldest daughters felt like having some sort of mother-role since the loss[13]. Most of them perceived this as a burden, such as a 17-year old girl who reported, one year after the death of her mother:

> "Just trying to find time to do everything, to take care of my siblings, work, find time for my friends, keep the house up ... I am just tired all the time" (0402T2).

Thus, apart from housekeeping tasks, these daughters felt responsible for their younger siblings. This responsibility often caused a number of worries and concerns. For example, for one 19-year old girl, the task of watching out for her sister became more difficult, two years after the loss, because she had entered College:

> "I sort of see myself much more in a mothering role towards my sister. I worry more about not being home...my life is definitely different now that I am in College. So it's a lot different from when I was living home all the time. Now I am not here as much as other people ... and I tend to worry about my sister a lot more since I am not around" (7302T3).

As pointed out earlier, the parenting efforts of older children were a frequent source of conflict in father-headed families (see section 3 on Getting along). Most of the younger siblings disliked their sisters telling them what to do, as described by a 12-year old boy, two years after the loss "it's better here since my sister moved out. She used to act like a boss" (0401T3). Adopting the role of surrogate parent not only put a lot of pressure on these girls because of the different household tasks they had to deal with. It also placed them in a problematic position among their siblings because they tended to be a target for their younger siblings' anger or criticism. Children in mother-headed families did not seem to be exposed to this kind of experience and pressure.

Taken together, there seemed to be two aspects in why children of father-headed families more often felt that they had a parenting role: Fathers did not clarify what their expectations were (section 6 on Perceived expectations), and fathers did not take over all the mothering functions (e.g., being present at home, dealing with chores). Since someone in the household had

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[13]It should be noted that in all but one of the father-headed families in the present subsample, the oldest child happened to be a daughter. This raises the question of whether the responsibilities and pressures are likely to be different in the case of an oldest son in a father-headed family.

to take over at least some of these roles in order to maintain continuity in family life, this tended to fall on one of the children. Thus, it becomes clear that, despite certain changes (e.g., improved communication, better recognition of children's needs), the way fathers dealt with their role as single parent head of household remained basically different from the mothers' approach.

Parenting styles. When parenting is a shared task, there are more possibilities to balance out conflicts of prioritizing than in a single parenting situation. Therefore, a newly bereaved parent is likely to be confronted with more of a necessity to set priorities and compromise between the children's and his or her own needs. Drawing on an earlier analysis of the Harvard Child Bereavement Study, Silverman & Gross (1996) suggested the concepts of parent- and child-centered parenting (see also Elkind, 1994). The pattern emerging from these findings was that surviving parents seemed to adopt a parenting style that either reflected the ability to see and respond to their child's needs, or to be too focused on one's own preferences to be attuned to the child's needs.

The mothers in the present subsample appeared to be very child-oriented in their parenting style. For example, one mother, two years after the death of her husband, described how she explicitly focused on providing stability for her children: "That's what I want to do to be the stability in that home; finish the work that we both started; that's what I really want to get done. I really think I need to be here right now" (1000T3). At the same time, another mother cast aside her own needs to such an extent that other people told her to get a life:

> "I do everything for them, I make sure they have everything. But I realized deep down I have to get my act together and start doing stuff for myself. I mean they are 16 and 19 now, but I still don't like to go out, knowing they are at one place and they are some place else. Everybody says to me, they are not 2 and 4" (5200T3).

Not all mothers felt that being there for their children was just what they wanted to do. Some clearly pointed out that there were major disadvantages to single parenting. But they also made it clear that, in the case of not coinciding needs, they would accept their children's needs as priority. As one mother put it: "If we're talking about the kids. They're top priority. I don't like it, but I have to" (1800T3). Another mother, during the second year of bereavement, felt that her children should respect her needs more: "When I go out sometimes they don't think, like during the summer I went out a lot because I was off. I got very angry and felt they weren't being fair, they always know were I am and I'm never far" (5300T3). However, as the other mothers, she mainly organized her day around keeping a certain routine for her children.

In contrast, the fathers seemed to be rather parent-oriented. When it came down to

prioritizing, they, after all, put their own needs first. This is reflected in the following example statements, made by two fathers, two years after the loss:

"I wouldn't let kids get in the way of dating or anything like that" (0400T3).

"When I have a social activity I just take the time" (4000T3).

Differences between mothers and father in terms of parenting style and prioritizing seemed to be reflected in dating patterns. As mentioned above, the five fathers (as opposed to one mother) in the present subsample of the Harvard Child Bereavement Study were dating by the second year of bereavement. In most of the father-headed families, children felt that their fathers were less available for them because of a girlfriend. These fathers often spent time with their girlfriends outside the home, and thereby excluded their children to some extent from this new relationship. For example, one father (5800T3) spent all evenings including dinnertime at his girlfriend's house, two years after the loss. Children commented their father's dating with statements such as:

A 14 year old girl: "He doesn't spend much time at home" (0402T3).

A 16 year old girl: "He puts everyone else first." (7301T3).

Older children were more understanding of their fathers' need for a partner and did not feel so threatened by it. Some talked in positive terms about their father's girlfriends, such as a 19-year old girl, one year after the loss: "I think she's really good for him because she talks to him" (5804T2). However, a 19-year old girl who generally approved of her father's girlfriend also clearly said that her father was not home enough because of his dating. She understood that his dating was difficult for her sister, and felt that her father should be home more often. Two years after the loss, she said to the interviewer:

"My sister is taking it all a lot worse. She's had to deal with it more and. She saw it from the very beginning, she said 'oh, you're gonna get married, you'll get married ... and we both sort of feel it's just too soon. I mean it's only been two years ... it's not his fault, but he's really not around that much, and I am not blaming him in the least. But just recently he was spending a lot of time with his fiancee and totally left my sister alone, and I just said 'I may be off in College, but you still have another daughter whose at home" (7302T3).

The father of the two girls knew that his youngest "didn't get enough attention while my wife was ill". Yet, he complained about her feeling like the neglected child: "She's 16 and her life is more important than anyone" (7300T3).

The children of the one mother (1800T2) who had started dating within the first year of bereavement had a quite different situation. Their mother's fiancee became an integrated part of the family. This mother felt that, together with this new partner, she was better able to raise her children. Both of her children understood her need for a partner and seemed to feel comfortable with it.

It appears that what made the difference was not whether or not the bereaved parent found a new partner. Rather it was crucial for the children how this was handled, or what kind of role this new relationship was going to play as part of the family life. In this regard, there seemed to be different patterns of dating. One was what seemed to take place in the mother-headed family: Having a new partner improved the situation for the children because it somewhat compensated for the loss of a parent (and if it was only through supporting the bereaved parent). The other one was what appeared to happen in father-headed families: The bereaved parent's dating made the situation for the children worse because it created the additional loss of the already not available enough father.

There was also an example in the father-headed group where the new partner contributed to reestablishing the family life. This father's girlfriend had moved in by the second year of bereavement. The family ate together more often, the children felt that they had less chores to do, and the father felt "like I have a partner in parenting" (1400T3). However, until they reached this point, the children were pretty much left to themselves. As the 12-year old daughter described it, one year after the loss: "I go to bed whenever I get tired and my father usually goes out" (1401T2). This was clearly not the situation in the mother-headed families. Mothers put their children and being there for them first, and that was one of the reasons why they did not date as much. If a new partner came in, it was also about having a partner for parenting, as the one mother who started dating explained "my main need was to have a partner. It's not good being a single parent. I need companionship to let me know if I am doing okay" (1800T2).

These dating patterns seemed to not only be based on different parenting styles, but probably had to do with differences in terms of what a partner was needed for as well. Considering that the fathers had less sources of social support and integration than mothers (see section 4 on Connectedness outside the family), it makes sense that they would need the new partner as a get away from the situation at home, while mothers obviously had other sources for that. But the most interesting aspect is that, although fathers, over time, developed a better idea of what their children may need (see section 6 on Being in touch), they still stuck to a more parent-centered approach, even after two years. This created a discrepancy between the insights that they started to have about their children, and the extent to which they actually acted (or not

acted) on these insights. There clearly was an overlap between mothers' and fathers' basic orientation in terms of parenting style, and their tendency to assume an either more nurturing or administrative role when it came to structuring home life (see section 7 on Maintaining continuity). Mothers appeared to be more child-centered and tended to adopt a more nurturing role, while fathers seemed more parent-centered and tended to assume a more administrative role. Looking at these patterns, the question, after all, is how these different approaches and their implications for the children were related to the families' accommodation to the loss.

8. Accommodation to Loss and Life Changes[14]

Adjustment to the ramifications of the death was reflected in the affective response to this loss as well as in the perception of growth in the face of enormous life changes. Bereavement research to date has primarily focused on negative consequences of loss, while aspects of growth and development have been rather neglected (Silverman, 1988). Therefore, this section first addresses family members' affective response (in two parts: qualitative and quantitative findings), but then moves on to a description of the ways in which they felt they had grown in the context of the loss.

Affective response: qualitative findings. Consistent with findings from the larger sample (Harvard Child Bereavement Study, Worden & Silverman, 1993), statements reflecting the affective response of the surviving parent indicated that the emotional state of mothers and fathers had a slightly different quality to it. Mothers talked about their grief more in terms of deep sadness than depression. They emphasized the distinction between sadness and depression. For example, one mother described her feelings, a year after the loss, as: "I find I'm more, not depressed, but unhappy, more sad than I ever was" (1800T2). Another mother, four months after the death of her husband, very eloquently illustrated this feeling:

> "I feel very sad, really the only feeling I can identify with ... a sore, but it's not a
> pain, or an unbelievable pressure, it's just an ache" (1000T1).

Fathers, on the other hand, described their grief in a way that had more of a depressed tone to it. This is reflected in the following example statements made by different fathers, four

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[14]The concept of accommodation has been formulated in different ways (e.g., Piaget, 1954; Brandtstaedter & Greve, 1994). The way it is used in this context corresponds to the use of the term in the bereavement literature (e.g., Rando, 1993), namely "accommodation" as synonym for adaptation.

months after the loss:

> "I feel like running myself down to the ground" (1400T1).

> "There are times when I feel like I'm going out of my mind" (5800T1).

For both mothers and fathers, the intensity of grief lessened somewhat as they moved away from the actual time of the death. A year after the loss, one father stated:

> "I want to live. Last year when I spoke to you, in my mind, my life had ended with my wife's death. I kept saying I have 6 years until my youngest is 18 and then I want to die, so I have to survive for 6 years. Now I don't want to die. I want to see the things my wife wanted to see, like the grandchildren. I feel like a new person. I really felt my life was over when she died. I found out that I can still be happy" (5800T2).

However, this change was clearly not perceived as final recovery, rather as a more bearable state of mind. While parents felt that things became easier over time, they also made clear that they did not just get back to normal, but that they moved to a place different from where they had been before the loss. One mother, two years after the death of her husband, described how the loss had changed her basic feeling about life:

> "It hasn't been bad. We cope, it's almost like being in a fog. You go along doing things that have to be done, but not with the same happiness and good feelings about the future because your significant other is gone" (1000T3).

Consistent with findings from the larger sample (Silverman & Worden, 1992), the children in the present subsample of the Harvard Child Bereavement Study most often reported being sad and angry. As described by a 12-year old girl, four months after the death of her mother: "I was angry when I found out ... and sad" (0402T1). In addition, some children talked about missing their parent, feeling confused or relieved. Seemingly, good and bad feelings sometimes coexisted. An 11-year old boy, one year postloss, talked about how memories of his mother sometimes felt good and sometimes sad: "Usually I feel calmed down, if it's good. If it's bad, then I feel not happy 'cause she's not there" (1801T2). Most children reported that it hurt less over time:

> A 14-year old girl explained, one year postloss: "I'm sort of coping with it, you know, I am not as upset as I was when he first died" (1001T2).

> One year later, her 16-year old brother reported: "I think it hurts more in the beginning because you get used to it. At least that's how it is in my case" (1002T3).

While a majority of the children felt that their grief had lessened over time, this clearly was not the case for all of them. It should be noted that those children who did not report a decrease in grief had all experienced the death of a mother. This seems to be consistent with the more intense sense of loss emerging from the description of what was lost reported above. For example, the 20-year old girl, who had talked about the loss of her teenage time, four months after the death of her mother, reported two years later:

> "The pain is so bad. I'd rather be physically beaten then to go through what I have to go through. I don't care what anyone says ... losing your mother is the most devastating thing.and I feel for anybody who has to go through that" (1804T3).

Thus, there seemed to be several notable differences between the mother- and the father-headed group with regard to affective response: Fathers talked about feelings such as not wanting to live anymore, while mothers framed their response more in terms of deep sadness. Looking at the children's perspective, only children of father-headed families reported that the intensity of their grief had either not decreased or even increased over time. These patterns are consistent with earlier findings from the Harvard Child Bereavement Study suggesting that, four months after the loss, children who lose a mother tend to deal with greater discontinuity and more subsequent concomitant losses than children who lose a father (Worden & Silverman, 1993).

Affective response: quantitative findings. One of the quantitative outcome measures most often used in bereavement research is depression. Depression-scores (CES-D; Radloff, 1977) of bereaved parents in the present subsample of the Harvard Child Bereavement Study reflected what grief models predict: that scores were relatively high at first[15], but that they decreased over time (F (2, 16) = 6.27; p = .01). While the Repeated measures ANOVA resulted in a significant time effect, there was no group difference between mothers and fathers with regard to depression scores. This suggests that mothers and fathers dealt with similar degrees of depression in response to the loss of their spouse, and that there was a certain improvement over time for both. However, Worden & Silverman (1993) found in a more detailed analysis of the original sample that fathers had selected the low self-esteem items on the depression scale more often than had mothers, which indicates that fathers were more likely to deal with what would be considered

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[15]Depression scores of bereaved parents were significantly higher than the scores of nonbereaved parents at Time 1 (F (1,18) = 9.97; p = .005). This suggests that depression scores in the bereaved group were elevated, four months after the death.

clinical depression. The qualitative findings from the present analysis supported this previous finding, by introducing an additional color or component into the picture: that mothers framed their affective response as deep sadness, while the fathers' description of their emotional state had more of depressed tone to it. One reason why this difference between mothers and fathers did not show in the Repeated measures ANOVA might be that the Total-score of the depression-scale could not detect this subtler facet of the affective response.

An analysis of children's outcome measures at all three time points lent further support to the conclusion from previous findings (e.g., Worden & Silverman, 1993), and from the qualitative findings presented above, that children of father-headed families had a more difficult time than children of mother-headed families. Repeated measures ANOVA with gender of parent as group factor, conducted on parents' assessment of children's emotional and behavioral problems (CBCL; Achenbach & Edelbrok, 1983), as well as on children's self-reports of perceived scholastic and social competence, self esteem (Perceived Competence Scale; Harter, 1982), and locus of control (Locus of Control Scale; Nowicki & Strickland, 1973), consistently revealed no time but group effects. At all three time points, children of father-headed families were given higher scores regarding behavioral and emotional problems (F (1, 14) = 13.51, p < .005). Children of these families indicated lower social competence (F (1, 13) = 11.92, p = .005), lower scholastic competence (F (1, 13) = 4.93, p < .05), and lower perceived self-worth (F (1, 13) = 9.65, p = .008) than did children of mother-headed families. Furthermore, children of father-headed families gave higher scores on the locus of control scale, which suggests that they felt more helpless and less able to influence their environment than children of mother-headed families (F (1, 13) = 17.75, p = .001)[16]. Table 13 presents means and standard deviations of the Child Behavior Checklist Total Score, the Perceived Competence Scale (Subscales Self Worth, Scholastic competence, Social competence) and Locus of Control at all three time points for the mother- and father-headed group.

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[16]While the children in the subsample that was explored were all preadolescent or adolescent, the only children who were older than 16 at the first time point belonged to the father-headed group. Considering that older children tend to have a stronger sense of empowerment over their environment and to feel less helpless than younger children (Worden & Silverman, 1993), this group effect seems to underline the problems in the father-headed group even more strongly.

Table 13: Means and standard deviations of the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL Total Score), Perceived Competence Scale (Subscales: Self Worth, Scholastic and Social Competence) and Locus of Control at all three time points for the mother- and father-headed group

Measure/Time	Mother-headed group			Father-headed group		
	T1	T2	T3	T1	T2	T3
CBCL Total						
M	47.36	43.82	46.30	56.45	61.55	55.67
SD	4.97	5.49	11.66	8.58	8.57	8.90
Self Worth						
M	35.36	33.55	32.10	28.67	25.82	26.33
SD	3.11	5.05	7.25	4.68	6.94	5.85
Scholastic Competence						
M	30.18	32.27	32.80	26.33	28.27	26.33
SD	6.26	6.03	4.54	7.84	6.51	6.50
Social Competence						
M	34.91	35.73	35.00	33.83	30.45	32.00
SD	3.21	3.23	4.03	5.01	7.31	2.00
Locus of Control						
M	8.91	10.00	9.50	13.25	12.09	13.50
SD	2.07	4.15	4.38	2.63	4.50	4.59

To visualize examples of these findings, the figures 4 and 5 display profile plots of group differences with regard to children's behavioral and emotional problems as well as perceived self worth:

Figure 4: Means of parent's assessment of children's behavioral and emotional problems at all three time points.
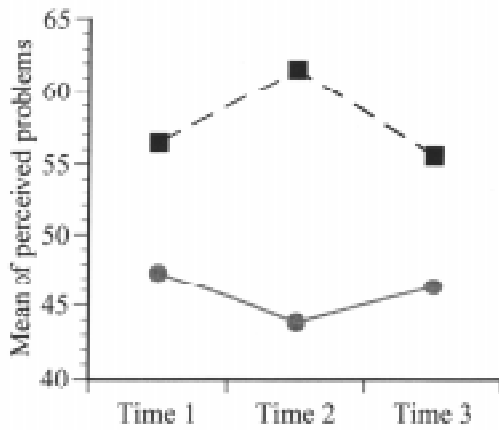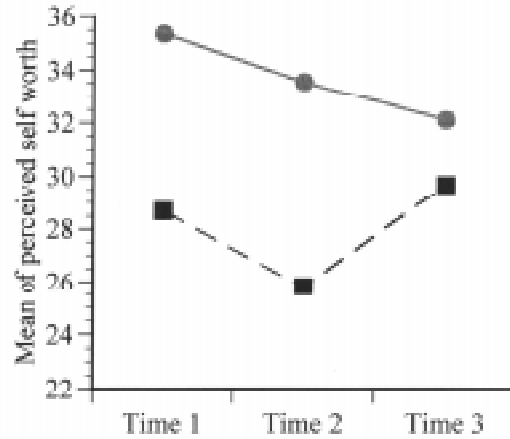
Figure 5: Means of children's self reports of their perceived self worth at all three time points.

—■— Father-headed families

—●— Mother-headed families

It is important to note that the analyses revealed no time effects, but consistently group effects on all these scales. Both parents' and children's assessments gave the same picture, suggesting that father-headed families had a more difficult time than mother-headed families, and that these differences did not significantly attenuate over time[17]. Thus, in many regards, father-headed families still seemed to struggle more, even after two years.

Perceived growth. While grieving the loss and adjusting to its ramifications was a central part of the accommodation process, the perception of growth was also very prevalent. Mothers talked about growth mostly in terms of increasing independence. For example, one mother said, four months after the loss: "I have learned how to do the checkbook and spend wisely" (5200T1). As pointed out by Silverman (1988), widows often develop a new sense of self after the loss of their husbands because their previous self was so much tied into their identity of being a wife. This phenomenon seems to be reflected in the experience that one mother described, two years after the loss of her husband:

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[17]Repeated measures ANOVA with group status (bereaved/nonbereaved) as group factor, conducted on parents' assessment of children's behavioral and emotional problems (CBCL-Total) revealed that children in the bereaved group were given significantly higher scores than children in the control group ($F_{(1,24)} = 109.42$; $p < .01$). This means that bereaved parents considered their children to have more problems than did nonbereaved parents.

"You get to a point where you feel like, no one is ever gonna tell me what to do. I am a little more independent, I don't look for quite as much approval as I did before. I don't take things as seriously as before, I have become more easy going, I have become less materialistic. I always wanted things to be really nice and now it's like, you are what you are, you can't change things" (5300T3).

One aspect that seemed specific to mothers was to voice, after the first year, that they had less of a need for support from the outside. Some even reported to feel overprotected, like one mother who complained, two years after the loss: "Everybody wants to protect me" (5300T3). One explanation for this may be that, since growing more independent was seen as a positive change in their lives, a certain amount of support from the outside was perceived as interfering with this development. At least, mothers seemed to value having more time to themselves. As one mother expressed it, a year after the death of her husband: "I actually have more time for me, to think about what I want to do, which is part of getting to know who I am" (1800T2).

Keeping in mind that these were families with traditional role structure, it does not seem surprising that fathers stressed more on having gained insights and feeling more responsible with regard to family issues. Examples for this are the comments by different fathers, one year after the loss:

"I think I put more time in for the kids now...I am more willing to help around the house and be more responsible" (1400T2).

"I have become more aware of what's going on in the house. I pay more attention to the girls" (7300T2).

"Something good about it would probably be that, for the first time, I'm really a parent. Before, my wife handled the discipline, housework, cooking. Now the kids are seeing me in that role, see that I'm trying. It made me feel good about myself. I know I'm doing just as good as possible" (4000T2).

These statements illustrate that, despite their struggles with the role of single parenting and their parent-oriented parenting style, fathers did feel that they had become more involved with their children, and they saw this as important and positive development in their lives.

All children reported, at some point during the course of the study, that they felt more grown up in terms of becoming more independent and responsible. For example, a 13-year old girl, four months after the death of her father, talked about how she felt more grown up in some ways. At the same time she stressed on still being a kid:

"I feel more responsibility, like I can't goof off now, I've got to be serious and everything, and I can't be a little kid anymore. I am still the same, I am not a grown up kid, I mean I can't live on my own" (1001T1).

While parents usually talked about aspects of growth linked to the death of their spouse, only few children explicitly expressed that they considered their maturing to be linked to the loss of their parent. Interestingly, those who did were all children of father-headed families. In one of these families, growing up through the loss was described as a burden, two years after the loss:

> The 15-year old daughter: "I feel like I've been through a lot ... things that older people would go through" (5802T3).

> Her 20-year old sister: "I've grown and endured a lot more than a 19/20 year old girl should. I've been rushed. I feel like I was skipped a few years of my life" (5804T3).

What the children in this family described appears to reflect the feeling of being rushed into adulthood rather than the perception of growth or maturation. However, this did not seem to be the general theme, even in the father-headed group. In some cases, loss-related growth contained strengthening aspects. For example, a 12-year old girl, one year after the loss, talked about how the reality of her mother's death changed her perspective regarding other problems:

> "Well I can take things better. Before she was gone I thought I couldn't handle things that were less harder than handling a death, but after I saw that I could handle my mother's death, I know I could handle the things that weren't as difficult as that " (4001T2).

Taken together, despite all negative feelings surrounding the loss, family members also talked about aspects of growth. This involved different developments for mothers, fathers, and children. Each of them reported having grown in an area of life that was new for them (e.g., fathers felt that they had grown in terms of being more involved with their children). Children generally felt that they had grown over the course of the study, which is what one would expect to hear from children of this age group, with or without a loss. Also, most children did not seem to see a link between the loss and their growing up. However, earlier findings from the Child Bereavement Study have shown that bereaved children tend to report having grown up more often than children from the nonbereaved control group (Silverman & Worden, 1992). While we cannot necessarily conclude from these findings that processes of growth among the bereaved children were mainly loss-related, they certainly indicate that the loss played a critical role in the development of these children. In this context, it is interesting that only children of father-headed families talked about growing up as being loss-related. Considering the differences between children of mother- and father-headed families with regard to their description of what they had lost, as well as their affective response, this may actually reflect a stronger connection between

perceived growth and the loss experience among children who lost a mother than among children who lost a father.

9. Summary

Before moving on to the discussion, I want to broadly summarize the major issues and patterns that emerged from the data. The aim of this analysis had been to examine how families deal with their daily life and each other after the death of a parent, and how this process develops over time. While exploring this question, I was going to be alert to differences between mother- and father-headed families. Lupton and Barclay (1998) in a recent review on fatherhood, argued that due to the emphasis on gender differences, other aspects of parenting as well as possible similarities between mothers and father might be obscured. The findings reported above show that while mother- and father-headed families were different in crucial regards, there were also many similarities that are worth noticing.

With regard to the *Circumstances surrounding the loss*, there were obviously more similarities than differences because this had been one of the criteria based on which families were selected from the larger sample. Families in both groups dealt with a lengthy time of illness preceding the death of a parent, which left all of them with memories of their loved one's suffering. The only difference to note here was that father-headed families had dealt with a longer illness than mother-headed families. The phenomenon of focusing on possible survival as opposed to preparing for the impending death, and therefore not really perceiving the death as expected, was also very prevalent in both groups.

In terms of the M*eaning of the loss*, the loss of a partner and parent was the primary loss for all surviving parents and children. More specifically, mothers talked about missing a partner for the daily life tasks, while fathers referred to the loss in abstract terms such as loss of a mother for their children. The main difference between the two groups, however, was that children in father-headed families described the death of their parent as loss of childhood or teenage time, while children in mother-headed families did not report implications of this kind at all. Based on these reports, it seemed that the sense of loss was much more intense for children who had lost a mother than for children who had lost a father.

The *Connectedness within the family* was similar in some regards and different in others. In both groups, family members reported to give and receive support from one another, but they also indicated that there were times in which they were unable to do so. Shared activities decreased to some extent in all families, and often this was attributed to the children growing

older. The perceived closeness drastically dropped only in father-headed families after the loss. However, the cohesion in this group increased again by the second year of bereavement, which means that the difference between the two groups attenuated over time. While all families reported some difficulties in getting along, conflicts in father-headed families seemed to be more severe.

The *Connectedness outside the family* also was both similar and different in certain aspects: Mothers seemed to have a larger social network that they drew on for social support. Fathers gained a better social integration and more sources of support over time (e.g., through a girlfriend and support groups). Children from both groups reported having close friends whose company they found helpful. Talking about the loss with friends, or being approached about it by adults was often perceived as not helpful, and in some cases as intrusive. The one notable, but crucial difference between the two groups was that fathers started mobilizing support only over time, while mothers engaged in mobilizing support from the beginning.

Communication patterns were mostly similar, except for a few differences between the mother- and the father-headed group. Talking about the deceased was somewhat problematic in all families. The main picture that emerged from the data was that in a majority of the families, parents tried to talk about the deceased, and that often, their children blocked it. Talking about the deceased was most often done by *sharing memories* or by talking about *what the deceased would do or say* in certain situations. Other ways of talking about the deceased reported by family members were u*sing humor*, and *using the deceased as a "moral rock"*. The absolute least favored and the most blocked way of talking about the deceased was *sharing feelings*. In general, to what extent talking about the deceased was possible seemed to depend on how creative family members were in terms of finding ways of talking about the deceased that worked for them and were comfortable for all family members. While these patterns were similar in mother- and father-headed families, there were also slight differences: In some of the father-headed families, fathers and children had to newly establish the daily life communication. A related issues was that, in these families, blowing up was a more prevalent way of responding to each other than in mother-headed families. Children in mother-headed families, on the other hand, sometimes felt overloaded by their mothers need to share feelings.

With respect to *Being in touch with each other*, there were more differences than similarities. The surviving mothers seemed to be much more in tune with what their children were going through. The surviving fathers described how they gained a better understanding of their children over time. However, these fathers did not realize that they needed to clarify what they expected from their children, or more importantly, what they did not expect. This may be

one reason why these children reported feeling burdened by perceived demands more often than children of mother-headed families.

Maintaining continuity in family life was another theme with regard to which there were more differences than similarities between the two groups. Mothers were more likely to adjust their own preferences to their children's needs. They made a conscious effort to create continuity in daily family life. While mothers focused on providing stability for their children, fathers tried to establish a new family routine by requesting cooperation from their children. This pattern seemed to reflect two distinct styles of organizing the household: a nurturing and an administrative style. Fathers recognized the importance of continuity only by the second year of bereavement. However, despite this realization, fathers seemed to stay more focused on their own needs than mothers. Realizing what their children needed did not necessarily bring them to act on these new insights. In general, there was a more drastic change in daily home life in father- than in mother-headed families.

In terms of their *Accommodation to the loss*, father-headed families were clearly more in trouble than mother-headed families. Children in father-headed families had more emotional and behavioral problems, and reported more severe worries and concerns about themselves and others. While fathers' reported feeling and managing better over time, the situation for their children remained difficult. Furthermore, in this group, growing up was more often perceived as a burden and as being loss-related than in the mother-headed group. How these patterns were related to dimensions of family functioning, and why the process of accommodation appeared to be different in the two groups will be discussed in the following section.