



Motherless Mothers

By Hope Edelman
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Introduction

When Hope Edelman finished writing *Motherless Daughters*, she thought she had said all she could about the long-term effects of early mother loss. Published in 1994, the book touched a nerve in women across the country and went on to become an enduring *New York Times* bestseller. Edelman, who was seventeen when her own mother died, told the collective story of mother loss with such candor, empathy, and informed wisdom that she quickly became a widely recognized expert on the topic.

But when she became a parent, she found herself revisiting her loss in ways she had never anticipated. Now the mother of two young girls, Edelman set out to learn how the loss of a mother to death or abandonment can affect the ways women raise their own children. From her exhaustive investigation, including a survey of more than one thousand women, comes *Motherless Mothers*, the

enlightening and inspiring next step in the motherless journey.

Questions for Discussion

1. Why is pregnancy an especially overwhelming experience for motherless mothers, and how does the prospect of a new mother-child relationship in their lives affect many of these women?
2. How does the experience of having lost a mother impact the emotions of first-time mothers, and how does it tend to influence their treatment of their newborns?
3. How does the author's decision to use examples from her life—including facts about the loss of her mother and details about her relationship with her two young daughters and her husband—to examine the many parenting challenges faced by motherless mothers impact your reading experience?
4. Why are motherless mothers especially vulnerable to feelings of guilt and anxiety when issues involving separation from their children arise in their everyday lives, and how does the author suggest they might deal productively with these feelings?
5. Why do motherless mothers tend to be overprotective of their children, and how does this overly protective attitude connect to their own desire to protect themselves from future loss?
6. What do studies reveal about the importance of maternal grandmothers, and how significant is this absence for the children of motherless mothers?
7. How can anxiety about death be good for one's psychological health, according to the author, and how does this anxiety manifest itself in motherless mothers?
8. How does the early loss of a parent help motherless mothers to emotionally identify with their children?
9. Why might the conflict, rebellion, and rejection so typical in relationships with adolescent children be especially difficult and problematic for motherless mothers?
10. How does the survey that the author includes in the index of the book reveal a clear picture of the motherless mothers interviewed for this book? Were there any other questions you would have liked seen added to the survey? Which ones?

About the Author

Hope Edelman has a bachelor's degree in journalism from Northwestern University and a master's degree in creative nonfiction writing from the University of Iowa. She is the author of the *New York Times* bestseller *Motherless Daughters* and its companion volume, *Letters from Motherless Daughters*. Her work has appeared in numerous magazines, newspapers, and anthologies. She lives in Los Angeles, California, with her husband and their two daughters.