**Results** The majority of participants described a desire to reunify before end of life. Indeed, later life events such as illness, the death of a friend, or one’s own impending death often triggered an intense need to attend to wills, determine legacy items, write letters and maybe even reunify with an estranged child. While participants expected their estranged child to come to their bedside if they—or their spouse—became critically ill, their actual experiences of this eventuality were mostly of non-reunification and a significant grief response ensued.

**Discussion** The ambiguous nature of intergenerational estrangement and its social disenfranchisement often intensifies the grief and loss associated with it. Later life is a period when ‘making sense’ or ‘meaning’ of estrangement can be particularly pertinent.

**Conclusion** This study suggests a significant role for allied health and human service workers in the preparation of estranged older people for the end of life regardless of reunification possibilities.