

Suddenly Solo:

Things to Consider after the Death of Your Significant Other



Everyday Concerns

- Check with your employer to see if bereavement leave is available to you. Taking time off will help you get things done for yourself – things that you need to do to grieve in your own way.
- As soon as possible, request official copies of your loved one's death certificate for the various notifications you will need to make regarding legal and financial matters, e.g. bank accounts, expense accounts, insurance policies, social security, etc.
- Consult with an attorney to see what paperwork needs to be done to make sure all assets are accounted for and your estate is in order.
- Consult with a financial advisor to handle all accounts and transactions.
- Allow your friends and family to help you. They may offer to bring meals or help with carpool, chores, etc. Don't shut them out from what is happening.
- Make all necessary changes to emergency contact information for your family.
- If you have school-aged children, contact their schools and develop a plan to support your kids.
- Make a family budget. Calculate short-term and long-term expenses and income to see if you need to allocate money differently.
- Organize bills and family schedules as efficiently as you can to minimize additional stresses.

Relationships

- Identify your support network and don't be afraid to ask them for help. Friends, family, and even community members want to be there for you, but sometimes don't know what to say or offer.
- If you have children:
 - Help your child maintain a routine. Losing a loved one, especially a parent, is very hard for children because they may not fully understand what is going on.
 - Give your child the facts about what happened and be as honest as possible when answering their questions.
 - Be open with your child about how you are feeling about the loss because they may not express themselves or their emotions until they see you do the same. Children learn by example and are typically more observant than they may seem.
 - Find creative ways for your family to express feelings, perhaps through words, music, or some other type of art.

For Yourself

- If possible, try not to make any big changes in the first year after the death. Typically, people don't think straight when emotions are high and they often end up regretting some of these decisions later.
- Acknowledge your emotions as they appear – don't try to hide them or numb the pain they may bring.





- Take care of your physical health. Sleep deprivation and not exercising can make grief even more difficult. Grief can be emotionally and physically exhausting. Don't add additional stress by neglecting yourself.
- With the help of family and friends, find ways to honor your loved one so you will be less likely to be caught off guard by inevitable grief triggers, such as birthdays and holidays.
- Write things down. With all of the new emotions you are experiencing, you may find that you are becoming more forgetful.
- Keep a journal. Writing about your loss, or even writing a letter to the deceased person, is a great way to acknowledge your emotions and stay connected.
- Find a ritual for yourself that is comforting to use on days that seem especially difficult.
- Memorialize one of your significant other's belongings or something that reminds you of them so that you can always keep a remembrance of them close to you.
- Don't expect too much of yourself too soon. Set short-term and long-term goals for yourself, but don't try to put a timeline on your grief. Remember: *everybody* grieves differently!

What Other Widows/Widowers Said They Wish They Had Known

- "Learn to live with 'the hole' – acknowledge it and know it's there, but learn to maneuver around it and work with it so you don't fall in."
- "Triggers will never go away, but they do get easier to live with. Accept that life will never be the same."
- "Spend time in nature – go for a walk or just sit outside, but be sure to breathe in fresh air at least once a day."
- "When people offer you support, take them up on it."

Further Reading:

- *Living With Loss* by Rachel Kodanaz
- *Finding Your Way After Your Spouse Dies* by Marta Felber
- *Healing Your Grieving Heart for Kids* and *Healing a Spouse's Grieving Heart* by Alan Wolfelt

References:

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