

A Spouse or Partner

When you find the person you plan to spend your life with, you invest in each other, the life you are building together, and so much more. You create memories, an everyday rhythm, and plans for the future. And when your spouse or partner dies, everything is affected, upended, and fractured by that loss. No matter how long you spent together—2 years, 20 years, or 62 years—it touches every aspect of your life, often leaving indescribable heartbreak in its wake.

Alongside the heavy weight of grief, you may also have to handle all the complexities of doing life alone—the household, finances, kids, and planning for the future, on your own, potentially for the first time. This transition can be frightening and lonely. Your life may be forever changed by this loss.

If you are grieving the death of your spouse or partner, here is some information that we hope will be supportive for you.

Know That Grief is Many Things

Some people may assume that grief is a feeling of sadness that lasts for a little while, but it is so much more than that. It is common for bereaved spouses to experience shock, numbness, confusion, despair, guilt, and anger at having been left behind. You may have trouble eating, sleeping, concentrating, or making decisions. It is natural that you might dread making and eating dinner if the person you cooked with is not there anymore, or struggle to go to bed because it makes you miss the person you wish you were sleeping beside. Bereaved spouses might experience extreme exhaustion and physical responses such as headaches, achy muscles, and even nausea.

Because it is also common for there to be struggles within relationships, bereaved spouses and partners may have additional difficulty navigating grief. Grief can be messy and expansive, unique to each person and set of circumstances.



Take Care of Yourself

It's important to take care of yourself after such a profound loss, even though you may struggle with how or why to do so. Attend to your physical health—see your doctor, eat well, move your body, and get enough rest—as much as you are able. It is hard to do these things after your world has fallen apart, but you don't need to aim for perfection. Just remember that you deserve care.

Sometimes taking care of yourself means finding the support you need. Look to friends or family who may be able to provide practical help—sorting out finances, caring for children, taking care of the household—and emotional support, such as talking with you about your grief or sharing memories of your person.

Be Patient with Yourself

All people experience grief in different ways, and some moments are harder than others. Grief shifts and changes over time, but its path is not straightforward. Don't expect that your grief will simply turn off at some point; the death of a spouse is life-altering. Even as you feel like you are on steadier ground, there will be hard days, events, or other triggers that bring deep grief to the surface again. This is all completely normal. Lean on the things and people you find supportive, and give yourself patience and grace.

Rebuilding and Reinvesting

After the life you were building with your person is shattered, you may struggle with what it means to rebuild and reinvest in a life without them. You may desperately long for the life you had, or struggle to imagine a life without them, while also knowing that you need to continue living. Patience will be needed as you find your own way.

When a spouse or partner dies, you may also lose your best friend, chef, mechanic, sounding board, cheerleader, hug-giver, devil's advocate, and so much more. You may be lonely for your person and also lonely in your grief. See if you can find supportive ways to connect with others and engage in the world around you. You may find the routine of a book club or community group helpful, or enjoy walking with friends or neighbors.

Seek Support

You may benefit from seeking additional support. It is common for bereaved spouses and partners to find meaningful support among others who are living with similar losses, especially as much of the world around you may struggle to truly understand what you are going through. You might connect with other bereaved spouses and partners locally or online. You might also benefit from professional support, especially if you find that grief becomes all-consuming and prevents you from engaging in the world around you. You don't have to face these challenges alone.