

How To Deal With the Death of Your Spouse

By Sherry Ford

The death of a spouse is one of the most traumatic experiences one can face. Whether the death is sudden or the result of a long illness, the feeling of loss can seem overwhelming. It is common to experience a whole gamut of emotions from denial to anger, numbness and shock. Anger is one of the most difficult feelings to deal with. You may be angry with your spouse for leaving you, or you may be angry with your doctor for not being able to save your loved one. Guilt over unresolved disagreements can make you feel even worse.

Grief causes physical as well as mental strain. It is common for those suffering a loss to feel irritable, lose weight and experience insomnia. Intense grief can even lead to hair loss and illness. The ways that you normally deal with stress may not be as effective when dealing with grief. For example, if you normally turn to food for comfort, in times of grief you may not want to eat at all.

Women may have an easier time coping with grief because they are accustomed to sharing their feelings with close friends. They also cry more easily which can offer tremendous release. Men are more inclined to internalize their feelings and keep up a stoic front of carrying on as usual.

Although spending some time alone to deal with grief is recommended, some people cut themselves off from others to the point of isolation, which can be dangerous. Those who do not have close friends or family to lean on for support should find a support group or counselor with whom they can share their feelings.

Women or men who have always depended on their spouse to deal with financial matters may feel anxious and confused about how to handle insurance matters, taxes and bank accounts. Don't be afraid to ask a trusted friend or family member for assistance. If your financial concerns are beyond their scope, they can help you find a financial counselor or attorney who can offer advice.

Men or women who depended on their spouse for cooking, household chores and shopping may feel particularly vulnerable and unable to cope. Adjusting to life without your spouse requires patience and may involve learning new tasks that you never had to deal with before.

If both couples were working and depending on two paychecks to maintain a lifestyle, the surviving spouse may have to make financial adjustments such as selling a home and car, finding a more affordable place to live, or hiring someone to assist with childcare.

For some people, remaining in the home they shared with their late spouse is a comfort. For others, staying in the house without their partner is unbearable. Every person is different. If you would like to remain in the house but dislike the idea of living alone, consider asking a friend or family member to move in. Moving to a smaller place and making a fresh start is always an option in the future. If most of your social activities in the past were as a couple, you may feel awkward as a single socializing with couples. Seek out other single or widowed friends and consider joining some associations to meet people who share your interests.

Expressing your feelings is one of the most therapeutic things you can do for yourself. Allow yourself to cry. Share your thoughts and memories with friends and family members. If there are things you are too embarrassed to say to others, write them in a journal. You may feel uncomfortable allowing friends and family members to see you in such a vulnerable state, but giving them a chance to support you in your time of need is an important part of the healing process. If your grief drags on for months and you feel hopeless and unmotivated, you should see a doctor to find out if you are suffering from depression.

Recognize that it is important to achieve a balance between privacy and companionship. You need time to experience your feelings rather than shoving them aside. Try to avoid isolating yourself. Establish a new daily routine that includes interacting with others. In time your feelings of immense grief will lessen and you will come to accept the death of your spouse and cherish the memories of your life together. For most people, a healthy adjustment to grief is acknowledging that your spouse would want you to get on with your life.