

For events that include the whole family, it may help to talk about and plan for these in advance so that everyone knows what to expect. Feel free to change your mind and do something different if you need to. Afterwards, talk openly about how it went, and plan any changes for next time.

Take time with your loved one's things

Your grief is unique. So, too, is the timing and way you choose to deal with your loved one's things. Don't allow others to push you with their ideas and expectations. Wait until you are ready, and do what is in your heart.

Learning to live with your loss

When you lose your partner, you learn that grief does not end. To heal is not to recover from grief, but to learn to live with your loss as you choose to move forward. It is a process that takes time as you adjust to life without the physical presence of your loved one.

Be patient with yourself as you work to let go of old roles and grow into new ones. It takes effort and courage to leave your "old self" and "normal" life behind. Know that you deserve to go on living as you remember the one you loved. You will find that hope emerges as you are able to make commitments to the future, reinvesting your emotional energy in life affirming activities.

Death is a natural and permanent part of life, just as grief is a natural and permanent part of love. As life and love are to be embraced, so then must death and grief be experienced and shared. In sharing, we find the path to healing.

One of the biggest roles we play in life is that of partner. As a partner, we learn about love and intimacy, and ultimately the heartbreak of separation. To lose a partner is to lose part of yourself. At this time, it is natural to feel fearful, lost and without purpose - to not know who you are without them.

Redefining your life as a separate human being is a journey that takes time, compassion and courage. Know that you are not alone. There are people ready and willing to support you. May this brochure help you along the way.



We offer this brochure as a means to convey our support. This brochure is not meant to replace the professional guidance of a psychologist or counsellor. As you move through this difficult time, please seek professional help if necessary.

LEARNING TO COPE *when your partner dies*



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Grief is personal

Everyone grieves differently. Your own journey through grief will be influenced by the events surrounding your loss, other losses you have known, the support you find, and your spirituality. You cannot compare your experience, for there is no 'normal' way of experiencing grief.

Some experts have attempted to explain grief as a predictable sequence of feelings and thoughts. This is misleading. Grief is not experienced in neat "stages". When you lose someone you love, you will experience your emotions in waves and sudden "pangs", and these feelings are likely to occur unpredictably for months after the death.

Know that there is no timetable to healing. Be patient with yourself. Give yourself permission to grieve in your own way, and in your own time. Allow time to attend to your grief, and special time to escape from the reality of what you are facing.

Give yourself permission to mourn

Grief and mourning are not the same thing. Grief is the internal experience of loss - the way we think and feel when we lose someone we love. Mourning is the outward expression of that grief. Many survivors grieve but they do not mourn. Instead they are told to "be strong" and "keep busy". And so they grieve inwardly and alone instead of releasing and sharing their emotions in the presence of loved ones.

Mourning is essential if you are to love and live wholly again. You cannot heal unless you express your grief, sharing it outside yourself, releasing it from your body and your psyche.

Treasure and share your memories, now and always. Exploring your memories and releasing the emotions they evoke is an important part of your path to healing.

Accept your emotions and physical limits

As you come to terms with your loss, you may experience the full gamut of emotions: despair, anger, fear, confusion, relief, resignation. At times you may swing from one extreme to another. While all this may seem frightening and overwhelming to you, it is a natural process. You are learning to live with the reality of your loss. You may dream your loved one is still alive, expect to see them walk through the door, or hear their footsteps in the house. These reactions, too, are natural.

Understand that the impact of your loss will also affect you physically. You are likely to feel tired, depressed, short tempered and unable to concentrate. At all times, treat yourself with compassion. Nurture yourself with rest and balanced meals, and cut back your activities where you can. Be realistic about what you can achieve at this time.

Your body will let you know when you need to release your feelings. A lump in the throat is a sign that you need a good cry. A headache or upset stomach may mean you are holding back anger. Tune into your body and honour its messages.

When you feel overwhelmed, it may help to ask yourself these questions:

1. How do I feel right now? Become aware of your body sensations, thoughts and feelings.
2. What do I need right now? Identify your immediate, attainable needs.
3. How can I meet these needs right now? It may be that you need a supportive friend to help.

Seek support

Seek out people you can talk to and be with, who are willing to share your journey through grief without judgement. When you feel safe, allow yourself to confide your memories, thoughts and feelings.

Do not accept anyone's attempt to discourage you from mourning. When someone tells you to "be strong", "keep busy", or "don't cry" it is because they want to protect you from pain and to ease their own sense of helplessness. They have yet to understand the workings of grief, or the path to healing.

Sadly, many survivors lack support when they need it most - in the weeks and months after the death when 'unreality' gives way to acute pain. You may find that much of your support network dissipates as others return to their own lives. Should this happen, know that you are not alone. There are many people in the community ready and willing to help: counsellors, therapists, a hospice or church.

Find a support group

At this time, a support group can be powerfully healing. People who have been through, or are going through, the same thing really do understand. Within this caring circle, you can find role models and mentors as you move through grief. You can ask, How did you survive? What happened to you? Here you will find not only emotional support, but practical strategies for coping with daily life. Most of all, you can simply let yourself be in an atmosphere of compassion and solidarity. A support group will give you the opportunity to create meaningful connections as you rebuild your life.

Find comfort in your spirituality

Grieving is a natural part of love. Your faith won't take your grief away. What it can do is give you comfort and strength as you move through grief. Your faith can be a light of hope you can shine into your future. If you are upset with God, it is okay. Accept this as part of your grieving process. Be with people who share your faith, and accept your thoughts and feelings without judgement.

Holidays and anniversaries

There will be days where your loss is particularly poignant, such as Christmas, anniversaries, and other meaningful occasions. You are likely to experience your grief anew at these times. We encourage you to share your feelings with a close friend or support group.

You may find comfort in creating a special tradition or ceremony to commemorate your loved one. Perhaps you could plant a tree, play their favourite music, or light a candle.