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# Surviving the Death of a Life Partner

There are few things in life that are as difficult and painful as the loss of a spouse or life partner. Sometimes the loss feels so overwhelming you wonder if you can survive it. It is important to remember that there are some things you can do to make your grief more bearable.

**Let yourself grieve in your own way and at your own pace.** The more you can honor your personal style of grieving, the better you will feel. There is no “right way” to mourn. There is also no timetable for grief, no exact moment when you should “feel better” or “get over it.” Grieving is not about “getting over” the death. It is about expressing your sorrow, sharing your memories, and learning how to go forward with your life. With time, you will find that your memories bring more pleasure than pain, and that you still have an ongoing connection with your partner.

**Allow yourself to feel.** You have lost the person you shared your life with, an essential part of yourself and your world. Feeling sad, lonely, disoriented, and unsure of your own identity is natural. Sometimes the intensity of the emotions can be frightening; you may feel as if you’ve lost control of your emotions or are “going crazy.” Painful as these feelings can be, they are all part of the natural response to the death of someone loved. Expect ups and downs, and be patient with yourself. The intensity of these feelings will subside over time.

**Express your grief.** Find your own personal style for expressing your grief. You may choose to talk to a supportive friend about your feelings and fears, your memories of your partner, the things you miss. Or maybe you like to write; consider writing a letter to your partner expressing your thoughts and feelings, or writing in a journal. Some people prefer creative outlets for their grief, exploring and healing through drawing, music, or other artistic expression. Others may choose physical outlets for their grief, such as exercise or gardening.

**Find support.** Find those who are comfortable listening to you, who encourage you to be yourself, and who can accept all of your feelings without imposing their own ideas of how you should be grieving. Some people find a support group or grief counseling helpful; often just a few sessions can help you feel less alone.

**Take care of yourself.** Grief takes an enormous amount of energy, and often disrupts eating and sleeping patterns. Getting regular exercise can help you sleep better, lowers your risk of depression, and can boost your immune system. Try to eat regular, nutritious meals. As best you can, try to get enough sleep – take naps during the day if you find you can’t sleep at night. Lighten your schedule as much as possible, and don’t be too hard on yourself when you can’t get as much done as you’re used to. Rest as much as you need to.

### **Be prepared for holidays and special occasions, especially during the first year.**

After the loss of a life partner, there are certain special days – holidays, anniversaries, birthdays – that will feel particularly painful. Often times the anticipation of the day is worse than the day itself – making plans ahead of time for how to spend the day can make it easier to get through. Some people find it helpful to celebrate in an entirely different way than they would have before their partner's death. Some may not feel like celebrating at all, and choose to bow out of family functions, while others find comfort in the company of friends and family. The anniversary of your partner's death may be especially hard; you may find comfort in special rituals, prayers, or other activities that memorialize your partner and mark their passing.

**Find peace in your own spiritual process.** For some people, religion is exceptionally helpful in the grieving process. However, personal faith does not make one immune to grief, or to the spiritual doubts grief can raise. Find safe avenues to explore your feelings, thoughts and questions. Take spiritual comfort where you can.

### **Give yourself time.**

- As much as possible, postpone making major decisions. If circumstances allow, do not move, change jobs, or make any large changes to your life until the intensity of your grieving subsides.
- Don't force yourself to go through your partner's belongings until you are ready. You'll know when you have the energy and desire to face this task.
- Be patient with yourself as you get used to all the changes. When your identity has been closely linked to your partner's, it takes time to adjust. Wear your wedding ring for as long as you want to – or forever if you choose.

Remember – healing doesn't mean forgetting your partner and the life you shared together. Your partner, and your relationship with them, will always be a part of you, kept alive in your memories.