

Coping with the Death of Your Spouse

Rebuilding Your Life

By Sheri & Bob Stritof, About.com Guide

One day you are married. The next day you are single, alone and grieving. It will happen. Nothing is forever. The bottom line is that everyone will need to journey on this rough passage, through a maze of details, decisions, forms to fill out, shock, loneliness, anger, confusion, fear, and depression. However, there can also be acceptance and new beginnings.

Stages of Death and Dying

Elisabeth Kubler-Ross wrote many years ago about the "stages of grieving": denial (shock), bargaining, anger, depression, and acceptance. It is important to realize that these stages don't have any particular order and that some people may find themselves back in a stage they thought they had already conquered.

This is normal part of grief. Don't allow yourself to get caught up with having to do things within a certain time frame. You'll know the right time to empty drawers and closets and deal with personal items like wallets and purses. Wait until you are ready.

It is Okay to Cry

Pain is necessary. So are tears. Tears do help. Crying is a healing device. Dr. Joyce Brothers describes tears as "emotional first-aid."

Tears contain leucine-enkephalin which is one of the brains' natural pain relievers. Tears also contain a hormone that encourages the secretion of tears - prolactin. Women have more prolactin than men, which is one of the reasons why they can cry more than men.

Dealing With Others

Many people are uncomfortable with death. As a result, they will say and do dumb things.

Forgive these folks. That don't know what to do or say. They don't realize that it is okay to mention your spouse's name, or look you in the eye, or to give you a hug.

Holidays and Special Days

Your life is changed and changing. The calendar will have a different effect on you as your wedding anniversary, Valentines' Day, special events, birthdays, and holidays come around. These dates must be dealt with.

Plan ahead for them and do what you want to do. Don't let yourself be manipulated by family and friends.

Looking to the Future

Dr. Joyce Brothers wrote in her book, *Widowed*, "And if there should ever be another good man with whom I share my life, there will still be that empty corner of my soul. I know what I had and what I lost. I hope I will not spend the rest of my life alone. But if I do, I will not be sorry for myself. Life goes on, and I am ready to join the parade again."

The U.S. Census states that on the average, widowers will remarry within 3 years of the death of their wives, and widows remarry within 5 years. Experts state that it is important though, to marry for love ... not because you are lonely.

Embrace Your Spirituality

If faith is part of your life, express it in ways that seem appropriate to you. Allow yourself to be around people who understand and support your religious beliefs. If you are angry at God because your spouse died, accept this feeling as a normal part of your grief work. Find someone to talk with who won't be critical of whatever thoughts and feelings you need to explore.

You may hear someone say, "With faith, you don't need to grieve." Don't believe it. Having your personal faith does not mean you don't have to talk out and explore your thought and feelings. To deny your grief is to invite problems to build up inside you. Express your faith, but express your grief as well.

Move Toward Your Grief and Heal

Remember, grief is a process, not an event. Be patient and tolerant with yourself. Be compassionate with yourself as you work to relinquish old roles and establish new ones. No, your life isn't the same, but you deserve to go on living while always remembering the one you loved.

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