



Loss of a Spouse

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Even if you knew your spouse's death was coming, you will experience a wide range of emotions. when faced with their death. We are never ready for death, even if our spouse was terminally ill and on hospice, we are still in shock when it comes. Maybe next week, or tomorrow. But today?

It is important as loved ones gather around you, not to judge their caring by their show of emotions. Everyone processes grief differently. So, Some may be very emotional. Others may show no emotion. It doesn't mean they are not grieving or not impacted. It only means that they handle loss and grief differently.

The loss of a spouse is particularly complicated when they were your caretaker, or handled finances or other duties that you have no clue about. In addition to grief, there are so many things than your spouse may have handled that now become your responsibility.

Whether you are grieving, or someone you know is, it is important to understand what is normal. It is helpful to be able to name your feelings and share them with someone that you trust, a friend, a pastor, a counselor.

Anger

Anger is a very normal reaction to loss. Your anger may stem from feeling helpless, powerless, or abandoned. It may also be directed at the illness your loved one struggled with, someone in particular, like the doctors, your loved one's choices, God, or even life in general.

Suggestions:

It is helpful to find a way to vent your feelings.

Talk through it with someone you trust.

Write about your feelings, describe them, and their intensity.

Use a punching bag, run, or involve yourself in physical activity.

Anxiety/Fear

These are also very normal reactions to loss. Feelings of anxiety or fear are often triggered by feeling vulnerable, or that your security is threatened. Questions may arise in your mind. Will I be okay? Does my life have any purpose after this? How can I possibly handle things that were my spouse's responsibility? Will other people I love die soon, too? What if something happens to me?

Suggestions:

Share your thoughts and feelings with someone you trust.

Writing about them can help but then it is important to share what you have written with someone.



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Guilt/Regret

If you are dealing with feelings of guilt, remember that, while it's a normal reaction to feel this way, your feelings may not be accurate. Consider why you feel guilty and whether you might actually be feeling regretful. There is a difference. Guilt, by definition, means that you have intentionally done harm to the person who has died. However, regret means that you wish you had done something differently.

Suggestions:

For guilt, write a letter to your lost loved one to apologize.

Ask forgiveness of other people.

Forgive yourself.

For Regret, determine what changes you might make to avoid regret in the future.

Relief

Relief may be one of the most common reactions when a loved one dies after a prolonged illness. We feel so strongly that we shouldn't be relieved that we sometimes hide the fact that we are. But relief is to be expected, especially after a period of intense suffering (as is the case with hospice care and terminal illnesses). It's okay to feel relief.

As human beings, we are complex and can feel both relieved and sad at the same time. What you feel does not minimize your love for the person or the depth of your grief.

Other common emotions you might experience:

Sadness

Confusion

Emptiness

Numbness

Forgetfulness

Depression

Denial

Mood swings

Resentment

A Few Tips for Dealing with Your Emotions (from hospicebasics.org)

1. Don't bottle term up. Let yourself feel what you feel.
2. Realize and accept that your emotions are complex.
3. Find ways to express yourself - writing or drawing or talking to a friend.
4. Give yourself time to grieve and process. There is no rush. Grief has no timetable.
5. If you need additional help, consider joining a grief support group or visiting a therapist.



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For Normal Physical and Mental Symptoms of Grief, go to:

<https://www.vitas.com/family-and-caregiver-support/grief-and-bereavement/coping-with-grief/the-normal-physical-and-mental-symptoms-of-grief>

8 Steps to Healing After the Death of Your Spouse or Partner (from vitas.com)

1. Allow Yourself to Grieve the Loss of Your Spouse or Partner

Your partner has died. If you feel confused, that's OK; you have lost a part of yourself. You are now faced with the difficult but important need to mourn. Mourning and grieving are the open expression of your thoughts and feelings. It is an essential part of healing after a loss.

2. Grieve in Your Own Way

Your experience with grief after the loss of your spouse or partner is influenced by the circumstances surrounding the death, other losses you have experienced, your emotional support system, and your cultural and faith background. Don't compare your grieving experience with that of others. Take a one-day-at-a-time approach that allows you to grieve at your own pace.

There is no right or wrong way when it comes to grief. See testimonial at:

<https://www.vitas.com/family-and-caregiver-support/grief-and-bereavement/coping-with-grief/there-is-no-right-or-wrong-when-it-comes-to-grief>

3. Talk Out Your Thoughts and Feelings

Healing starts when you can share your grief with others. Allow yourself to talk about the death, your feelings of loss and loneliness and the special things you miss about your partner.

4. Feel a Mixture of Emotions

Experiencing overwhelmed if you suddenly experience periods of pain or grief that seem to come from nowhere. Allowing yourself to learn from these feelings and emotions helps you heal. The death of a spouse or partner affects your head, heart, and spirit. Confusion, disorientation, fear, guilt, relief, and anger are just a few of the emotions you may feel. Don't be overwhelmed if you suddenly experience periods of pain or grief that seem to come from nowhere. Allowing yourself to learn from these feelings and emotions helps you heal.

5. Find a Support System

Reach out to people who care about you and are willing to walk with you through your grief. Find a support group you might want to attend. Avoid people who are critical, judgmental or who want to give advice. You have the right to express your grief, but you also have the right not to share.

6. Understand that Grief Is Hard Work

Grief is emotional and physical. You feel and live through your emotional, physical and spiritual being. Respect what your body is telling you. Treat yourself as you would a good friend.



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7. Do Things When the Time Is Right

There are practical things you must do right away, but for the most part, don't make yourself do anything until you are ready. You can make some decisions now and wait before making other decisions. Don't let others make decisions for you.

For a checklist of practical things to take care of, go to:

<https://www.vitas.com/family-and-caregiver-support/grief-and-bereavement/coping-with-grief/practical-tasks-following-the-death-of-a-loved-one>

Do not make any major decisions right away.

8. Celebrate the Memory of Your Spouse or Partner

The times you will miss your partner most are the special days the two of you shared. Since pain and loss can be greater during those times, it might help to be with someone else. Share your memories with friends, if you wish, but continue to honor the life you and your spouse or partner shared by keeping a special place in your heart to celebrate and cherish your memories of togetherness.

For ways to honor your loved one, go to:

<https://www.vitas.com/family-and-caregiver-support/grief-and-bereavement/coping-with-grief/ways-to-honor-a-deceased-loved-one>

Taking time to process and confront your emotions is a necessary part of every grief journey. Your feelings may not go away but they will, over time, become less intense and less frequent as you establish a new normal for you.

There are several parishes offering Catholic Grief Support Groups including Santa Sophia, St Therese, and Our Lady of Perpetual Help.

Beginning experience is also a Catholic weekend experience addressing Grief.

Beginning Experience Weekend

This weekend program is intended for those suffering the loss of a love relationship as widowed, divorced or separated, who are ready to come to terms with that loss and move forward with their lives.

- Helps grieving persons focus on their experience and emerge from the darkness of grief into the light of a new beginning.
- Offers an opportunity, through God, for turning the pain of loss into a basis for positive growth.
- Founded by a Catholic nun and rooted in the Christian tradition, the ministry's open, inclusive spirit serves those of all faiths.

In the Beginning...Coping with Life Alone offered live and online (one-day)



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In the Beginning...Coping with Life Alone is a one-day introductory program designed to help those who are grieving the loss of a spousal relationship due to death, divorce or separation. The program helps the participants begin to deal with the loss and focus on what lies ahead. It is a day of support for those who are seeking hope and healing. While it is intended to assist those newly grieving, all are welcome to attend.

Moving Forward with Hope...Coping with Life Alone offered live and online

Moving Forward with Hope...Coping with Life Alone (formerly known as just “Coping with Life Alone”) is a multi-session, in-person program designed to help those who are grieving the loss of a spousal relationship due to death, divorce, or separation. This program helps participants explore the impact of their loss and how to handle the feelings that accompany it. This program can be the beginning of the healing process.

For more information on Beginning Experience, contact beginning experience:

beginningexperienceSD@gmail.com or 858-748-2273

For more resources, support groups, or Catholic therapists, contact Rich hello@thechurchofstluke.org