

Grief.....Death of a Spouse

Introduction

The death of your spouse will mean many changes in your life. You will need to deal with many issues and adjustments. The loss of a shared life will have an impact in terms of practical and financial issues, parenting and family roles. It can affect your intimate life, social connections and your hopes and dreams for the future.

Cultural

In our culture, it has become difficult to grieve. There are few traditions, guidelines or family support systems available. Many of us have no morning rituals or clear expectations of how grief should be. Often other people do not acknowledge death and grief. They do not want us to take the time necessary to express our grief and to adjust to our loss.

Immediate family and friends can misunderstand a bereaved spouse and be impatient with their reactions. There is an expectation for grievers to 'get on with life'. People may hide their grief so they do not lose what support they do have.

There is little recognized status to being a widow or widower in our culture. For a woman, the death of her spouse may mean a dramatic change in her place in the external work, as her spouse may have been her link to social and community status. For a man, the greatest change may be in the emotional support and friendship connections provided by his wife.

Social

Often, social status, community roles and friendship connections are defined as part of a couple. When your spouse dies, your link with your social circle and the community at large may be gone. You may find that your roles and connections with family, especially if your spouse was the one who maintained these relationships, is altered.

Whatever the cause of your spouse's death, it will be a challenge to maintain social connections. If your spouse died suddenly, friends and neighbours will often respond well initially, but may find it difficult to continue providing the support you need. If you have nursed someone through a lengthy illness, you may have had to let go of other relationships and activities. Not only is the focus or purpose in your life gone, but also you do not have the energy to rekindle old friendships or to establish new ones.

With the loss of your spouse as your social companion, you will begin to relate to the world differently. The status of being a bereaved person may be respected for only a very short time.

Others may treat you treat as a single person long before you think of yourself this way. Becoming a single person again is a major change.

Challenges and Issues

The loss of a shared life may affect or affect you in many ways. The following list offers some of the issues that bereaved spouse face. These may help you to know that what you are going through is normal. Remember that everyone has a unique response to loss, so that some of these issues will be recognizable to you and some of them will not.

Practical	Having to do it all; house, yard, finances, shopping, laundry, family <i>What resources do you have?</i>
Financial	Income or status may be very different; decisions to make alone, how to do things <i>Where can you get good advice?</i>
Parenting	whether actively raising children or relating to grown family and grandchildren, full responsibility, doing it alone, no one else who cares as much, decisions relief <i>Where can you get support?</i>
Intimacy/Sex	Loss of physical intimacy; low self-esteem; loss of lover, friend and admirer <i>Who appreciates and cares for you now?</i>
Interests	Time shared doing things together; goals, plans, holidays, hobbies <i>Who will share things with you now?</i>
History	Someone who remembers you when...; intimate knowledge of your life, ups and downs, successes <i>How can you keep the memories alive?</i>
Hopes & Dreams	Future is gone; can see nothing ahead, meaninglessness, loneliness <i>How can you find meaning now?</i>
Social	Maintaining old friendships, creating a social life, adjusting to the single role <i>Who are your friends now?</i>
Family	Maintaining relationships; sharing grief, memories, difficulties; communicating needs and wishes, dealing with sense of responsibility <i>How can the family regroup after this loss?</i>