

# PATHWAYS CENTER *for* GRIEF & LOSS

## COMMON LGBT GRIEF ISSUES FOLLOWING THE DEATH OF A PARTNER OR SPOUSE

- Older LGBT individuals have relationships that are as long term as many marriages...20, 30, 40, 50 years or more. Yet the significance of their relationships is often minimized by heterosexual culture.
- Even for those who knew the couple, the loss may not be recognized at the same level as the death of a different sex spouse. (“I am not his/her friend or his/her roommate. I am his/her husband/wife.”) This attitude can cause increased vulnerability in mourning and may sometimes develop into mental health issues.
- There is a difference between tolerance and respect so it may be difficult to access positive, consistent supports. Local assisted living and retirement communities do not generally accept LGBT couples or, if they do, include a financial penalty. LGBT couples could face prejudice from staff or other residents which may lead to inadequate care.
- One partner may have been more open about sexual orientation than the other. This may lead to a conflict for the surviving partner about how to refer to the deceased and how much to reveal to family and friends.
- LGBT survivors may not feel comfortable joining overwhelmingly heterosexual support groups, contributing to additional vulnerability during an already vulnerable time.
- Documentation, even for legally married gay couples, needs to be carried during travel or vacations. Hospitals require legal papers in hand as proof of the partner’s right to make medical decisions, end of life decisions, or even call a funeral home to have the deceased moved from the hospital bed.
- Many of the laws in the state of PA contribute to lack of rights and access to resources such as inheritance, adoption, equal and fair housing practices, and fair hiring and workplace conditions. Some LGBT individuals may fear the risk of losing employment if openly mourning their gay partner.
- When seeking comfort during a time of grief and loss, LGBT couples with strong religious faith often experience judgment rather than support in many churches and synagogues.

Some of the information contained on this handout was provided with permission by  
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