

PATHWAYS CENTER

for GRIEF & LOSS

GRIEVING THE DEATH OF A SPOUSE OR COMPANION

There are many areas of your life affected when you transition from being a “couple” back to a “single” person. The loss of a spouse or companion can bring significant changes in many of the activities of daily living that you used to share with someone else. How do you continue to function in a world that is suddenly so different from what it once was? While trying to adjust to this major loss and all the changes involved, consider the following:

- You may find yourself turning to discuss an idea or question with your loved one after he or she has died. This is a natural response, and many people find it helpful to continue to talk to their loved ones.
- Let others know how they can help. You may be reluctant to express your needs at first, but you might find it easier when you can be honest with others about what does and does not help. Friends and family will appreciate your honesty and are better able to support you if they know how you are really feeling.
- Know that your circle of friends may not realize how difficult it is for you to socialize with them as a “single” person. Be honest, and try to continue your relationship in new ways that allow you to feel more comfortable and in control.
- Your feelings about your home may have changed. Consider waiting before making any major changes with your home, as some have eventually drawn comfort from what they initially wanted to avoid.
- Are you uncertain, or even agonizing, over what to do with your loved one’s personal possessions? Although others may give you their suggestions, it is ultimately your decision. Trust your instincts about when it feels right to go through these items. Do not force yourself before you are ready. Keep in mind there is no right or wrong way to do this. Everyone’s timetable is different.
- If you are struggling with a special day such as an anniversary, choose one or two others to talk with about it. This may feel less burdensome to you, and can help others be more sensitive to your needs.
- Evenings and weekends can be especially difficult. To lessen the potential for feeling overwhelmed, look at each day in small segments of time. Think only about Friday evening and what you want to do that night. Then make a small plan for Saturday morning, such as going to the bank or store, without thinking about the whole day. Your anticipation of certain days or events can actually be more difficult than the day itself.

- Be careful not to confuse “time by yourself” with “being lonely.” As you slowly adjust to being single, look for times when you feel comfortable being by yourself. Not all “alone” time has to be “lonely” time for you.
- Although it may bring pain and tears to remember and talk about your loved one, continue to include them in conversation and honor their memory. You don’t ever want to forget the importance that person played in your life. Find safe and nurturing places to talk about your spouse or companion, and find ways to express how you are still feeling.

If you are confused with the myriad of emotions that you feel, try to live in the moment and accept them as they come. If something makes you laugh, rejoice in the feeling it brings, even if it is just for a short time. After a major loss, people often feel they need to hold on to their negative emotions to prove the love they shared. This is a misconception. All of your emotions can be a testimony to your relationship. In time, you will have more moments of joyful or comforting recollection and fewer moments of painful reminders. These times become the legacy of your loved one that you carry forward and pass along to others as you begin this new chapter in your life.