



after the death of your husband, wife or partner

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Many factors will influence your grief such as the nature of your relationship and how close you were or how dependent you were on each other. Other factors include how the death occurred, your age and family situation – do you still have dependent children at home? Couples may have been together for a long time but closeness may have dwindled with separate interests, friends and sources of happiness. Where a relationship was spent sharing time and intimacy with common interests and ideals, there will be a greater amount of distress and more adjustment needed to the changes that are now taking place.

Some common experiences include:

- **The loss of their physical presence** – there is no conversation partner, no one to chat with about the day you've had, no closeness from a hug or kiss, the bed is empty, their place at the table is bare, the whole house seems empty, sometimes you find yourself talking to them as if they were still there or you wait for them to walk through the door. Everywhere you look there are reminders. This can make you sad, tearful, or even resentful that you have been left on your own.
- **Loneliness** – even if you have children, other family and good friends, you still feel lonely; you are the odd one out at a dinner party, you see couples shopping together, dining out in restaurants, walking the dog just like you used to. Society seems to be geared up for couples, you are single again. You have lost your companion, your soul mate. There can be intense longing for them, despair at the emptiness and both physical and emotional pain over the separation you are feeling.
- **The need to review the relationship** – you may want to talk about him/her over and over, you may find yourself preoccupied with your thoughts, thinking about every aspect of your relationship and how things were, you may find yourself reminiscing over good times or feeling remorseful about harsh words said, or not doing enough or not being the 'perfect' partner often enough.
- **Change in role and loss of practical support** - There's no one to talk over problems with, or help you make decisions; you may need to learn new skills like managing finances or how to do chores around the house or getting a job to help with income or organising child care if you have young children. You can become anxious, fearful, overloaded by this responsibility.
- **Coping through difficult times** – packing up personal belongings, attending family events on your own, watching couples just being together, hearing favourite music, listening to friends talking about their spouse/partner, special occasions like anniversaries, Christmas, birthdays and wondering how to commemorate them. Such times can increase your sense of isolation and missing the person and just wanting them back. You may find yourself getting angry or resentful at the insensitivity of what others say and do – can't they understand what you're going through?
- **Keeping up appearances** – the quality of the support you have will vary and impact on how well you can cope with your changed life. If you find you have to hide your grief or if you tell yourself you must be strong and set aside your feelings because of the children you may find your grief piles up on you as you have no one to share it with or no way of letting it out. People who allow you to be yourself, who are sensitive to the difficulties of being on your own and learning to adjust will have a significant impact on how you get through this.

Doris Zagdanski is a leading figure in modern day grief and loss education. Her seminars are included in vocational qualifications in Allied Health, Counselling and Funeral Directing. Her books and free factsheets are available at www.allaboutgrief.com