

Do Men and Women grieve differently?

Women, through their conditioning tend to be loss oriented and are very concerned with their feelings. They want to focus on their loss by remembering the person who has died. They have a need to express their emotions and to cry.

Men feel deeply their loss but society does not encourage them to express these feelings. Instead feelings are suppressed, while they try to be strong and organise funeral arrangements and stay on top of things. This causes them to appear to be functioning normally and appear as though nothing has happened. Family and friends can support them by providing opportunities to talk and express their needs.



‘We cannot stop the bird of sorrow landing on our shoulder, but we can prevent it nesting in our hair.’

Chinese proverb

Practical Issues which arise:

Involve:

- Registering the Death and getting a copy of the Death Certificate
- Notification of the death to the Tax Office
- Notification of the death to Employers
- Notification of the death to financial institutions
- Accessing Entitlements
- The sorting of Insurance if it applies
- The sorting of finances
- Pension rights
- Probate
- Legal issues
- Inquests (if a death was sudden)

Further information regarding practical issues which need to be addressed when a spouse dies are available in the **Bereavement Information** booklet produced by the Regional Suicide Resource Office, Waterford.

A Comhairle booklet entitled **Bereavement** is available in Citizen Information Centres. A companion leaflet on **Children’s Grief** describes the experiences of children after a death.

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Grieving the Death of a Spouse / Partner

‘When you are sorrowful, look again in your heart, and you shall see that in truth you are weeping for that which has been your delight.’

Kahlil Gibran, The Prophet

Our leaflet **‘Understanding Grief’** explains the experience of those bereaved following a death. This leaflet gives further information on the issues which arise when one is bereaved through the death of a spouse.

The death of a spouse or partner leads to painful grief. The loss involves the loss of a chosen relationship, companion, lover, parent of one’s children, friend or soulmate. The couples’ relationship has been closely woven, in most cases, with the result that the loss of one’s partner may cut across the very meaning of the other’s life. This loss can cause feelings of disorientation, uncertainty and confusion as one may need to take on roles and tasks previously carried out by the deceased.



‘All changes involve loss, just as all losses require change.’

Robert Neimeyer

Healing can occur when there is open expression of one’s thoughts and feelings regarding the loss. One needs to grieve in their own special way. This loss is unique as no one, not even your children has had the relationship which you shared with your spouse.

Grief will rise at unexpected times. It is important to have a support system of family and friends who understand your loss.

What is needed?

- Do not be rushed into decisions
- Be gentle with yourself from the start
- Eat what you can, but **do** eat.
- Rest during the day especially if you are not sleeping at night
- Seek those who encourage you to be yourself whether you are happy or sad
- Avoid those who try to tell you how to grieve
- Express your feelings openly to those who care for you
- Take time to reflect and remember your relationship with the deceased
- Cut back on your workload if possible
- Be tolerant of your physical limits, grief is tiring and low energy will slow you down
- Listen to your body
- Treasure the memories that comfort you
- It is not unusual to be angry with God
- Give yourself time and compassion
- Do things in your own time
- Try to avoid anaesthetics such as alcohol



‘Sorrow, like a river, must be given vent, lest it erode the bank’.

- Many practical details will need to be sorted e.g. death certificates, finance, insurance etc. Allow a trusted other to support you when sorting such details.
- Don’t force yourself to go through your partners belongings until you are ready. You will know when it feels right and you wish to do so.
- Milestone events such as birthdays, anniversaries and holidays or other family events will be difficult as they bring up the absence of the deceased. Take time to remember your partner on such days and plan in advance how such days will be celebrated.
- Find ways to commemorate your spouse’s life. Healing does not mean forgetting.
- Try to notice the little things that help you get through the day.
- Trust that the pain will become bearable.
- It’s okay to have a bad day. Grieving takes time and we need to be patient with our progress.

Remember that with your loss there is a sense of chaos. Depending on the cause of death one often experiences the loss of dreams and a future together. For the older widower the grieving involves the loss of a long relationship shared with the deceased. One thing is certain, we need to actively grieve when a spouse dies in order to restore our faith in love and life. This grieving will take time. We don’t ‘get over’ grief instead we learn to live with it, just as we choose to go on living.