



WHAT TO DO WHEN A LOVED ONE DIES

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ABSTRACT

Learn practical advice for dealing with financial matters after the death of a loved one. Find grief resources and organizations. Free yourself to do the emotional work you need to be healthy.

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“Under Construction”

First, let me say whole-heartedly that I am sorry for your loss. Thank you for downloading this guide. I hope that it is helpful in your journey ahead.



About six months after my dad died in 2018, my mom and I attended a lecture. The speaker was Alan Wolfelt, PhD, a grief expert who founded the Center for Loss and Life Transition in Fort Collins, Colorado. Years later, I remember the feeling of community during the talk, surrounded by people who had also lost a loved one. What resonated then still rings true: grief and love are more than the sum of their parts. We need the support of others as we mourn. In our new world of COVID, I cannot think of a more important and timely message.

After the lecture, Dr. Wolfelt offered up lapel pins to everyone in the audience. The buttons said, “Under Construction.” Why the buttons?

Grief is a transformative process. It requires patience, perseverance, and care. Recreating your life after grief is an affirmation of hope. It is one of the hardest jobs you will ever have.

Gather a Supportive Team

Assemble a team during your grief process to handle the “to dos” associated with losing a loved one. This frees your time and energy to do the work that only you can do. Consider bringing your financial advisor, your CPA, and your estate planning attorney together on your team.

Your Financial Advisor creates your financial plan, transitions and retitles assets, updates beneficiaries, and assists with insurance claims in accordance with your wishes.

Your CPA helps with taxes and closing out the estate of your loved one.

Your estate planning attorney provides legal guidance on carrying out the instructions of your loved one’s will or trust. Your attorney helps determine whether probate is necessary and handles legal filings.

Taking First Steps

What follows is a set of grief resources and a list of practical steps to undertake after the death of a loved one. Many of these tasks can be outsourced to a friend, a family member, or a professional, giving you time and energy to do the real work of grief. The timeframes are loose recommendations, not deadlines.

Large change starts with disorientation. It is normal to enter a stage of “cocooning” and to experience time distortion during mourning. Because of this, *it is paramount to give yourself a buffer zone from making large financial decisions*. This “decision-free zone” is unique to your needs, and it can range from several months to several years. AIFS advisors are here to support your financial life during this process and to “walk with you” on your journey.

Grief Resources

Books:

A Grief Observed by CS Lewis

Finding Meaning: The Seventh Stage of Grief by David Kessler

On Grief and Grieving: Finding the Meaning of Grief Through the Five Stages of Loss by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross and David Kessler

Love Loss Light by Karen Trench

One Mindful Day at a Time and the many books and guides by Alan D. Wolfelt, PhD.

Organizations:

Center for Loss and Life Transition www.centerforloss.com

Elizabeth Kubler-Ross Foundation <https://www.ekrfoundation.org/>

Five Wishes <https://agingwithdignity.org/>

Grief Stories www.griefstories.org

Hospice Foundation <https://hospicefoundation.org/>

Healgrief.org <https://healgrief.org/>

National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization: www.caringinfo.org

What to Do When a Loved One Dies: A Practical Checklist

Immediately

- Contact loved ones (family and close friends).
- Check on the emotional state of survivors (including yourself) and arrange for support as needed.
- Arrange for dependent care if needed.
- Get a legal pronouncement of death. This can be a doctor, nurse, coroner, etc.
- Arrange for organ donation, if applicable. Check driver's license
- Evaluate and secure your loved one's residence.
- Contact funeral home, crematory, or donation organization and arrange for transportation.

As Soon As Possible

- Begin making funeral, burial, cremation, and/or donation arrangements
- Obtain death certificates (usually from funeral home). Get multiple copies.
- Keep track of all payments for funeral, burial, and other expenses.
- Hire an attorney for the will if necessary.
- Take the will to the appropriate county or city office to start probate.
- Notify post office to hold or forward all mail delivery.
- Stop any recurring home deliveries.
- Identify any last wish letters or verbal expressions of last wishes.
- Locate any of the following items belonging to your loved one:
 - Driver's license, birth certificate, or other personal identification
 - Wills, codicils, trusts
 - Safety deposit box/keys and/or safe combination
 - Life insurance policies
 - Social security card
 - Deeds, titles and registrations for real estate and vehicles owned by your loved one
 - Healthcare, veterans, and/or Medicare cards
 - Bank, investment, and other financial accounts
 - Lender/debtor information (credit cards, mortgages, personal loans, rental agreement, etc.)
 - Last taxes filed
 - Beneficiary designations for all financial accounts
- Notify the following individuals and agencies (many may require a death certificate):
 - Primary Care Physician
 - Social Security Administration
 - Employer(s) and other income providers such as pensions, annuities, etc.
 - Veteran's Administration if your loved one was a veteran
 - Religious organization (priest, minister, rabbi)
 - Unions and other fraternal organizations
 - Police, friend, or relative (to periodically check on vacant property)
 - Advisors (financial planner, attorney, CPA, accountant, trustees, POAs, etc.)
 - Utility companies
 - Lenders/debtors
 - Credit reporting agencies: Experian, Equifax, Trans Union. Request credit report.

- Insurance Carriers/Agents regarding any of the following policies held by your loved one:
 - Health
 - Homeowners/Renters
 - Life
 - Auto
 - Disability
 - Long-term Care
 - Annuities
 - Umbrella
- Determine death benefits available:
 - Life insurance
 - Employer
 - Veterans administration
 - Social security
 - Annuity
 - Unions or other fraternal organizations
- Close/cancel the following if applicable:
 - Driver's license
 - Insurance policies
 - Credit cards
 - Email accounts
 - Social media accounts
 - Phone, cell phone, etc.
 - Recurring prescriptions
 - Automatic payments for services, subscriptions, etc.
- Remove any perishable food and live plants from your loved one's home.
- Identify annual passes, subscriptions, memberships, etc. and request any refunds available.

Intermediate Term

- Establish a waiting period for making long-term financial decisions.
- Determine disposition of personal assets.
- Identify and pay important bills.
- Identify ongoing services (landscaping, house cleaning, etc.) and decide whether to cancel or continue.

After an Estate is Opened

- Arrange transfers of all financial accounts.
- Open an estate account to pay ongoing bills and expenses.
- Executor must file an account with the probate court listing any income of the estate since date of death.
- Decide whether an estate sale is needed for personal property.
- File federal estate tax return within 9 months of the death.

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