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Suddenly Single: How to Help Yourself or a Colleague Survive the Loss of a Spouse

Losing a spouse or partner is life-changing in ways you cannot fully comprehend until you go through it yourself. Complicating the experience for faculty is the need to keep working as much as possible. Learn what helps—and what doesn't—whether you are facing this crisis yourself or want to help a colleague who is.

Should you confide in colleagues?

It can be difficult to know what to say to colleagues when your spouse is close to death or has already died. You may want to be selective about who you tell.

“Certainly, you should let your supervisor know,” says Allyson Moskowitz, social services and volunteer services manager for Good Shepherd Hospice. “You do not have to confide every detail. But it can help them understand if you act differently at work, have trouble concentrating, become emotional or miss work. We hope, of course, that bosses will be compassionate in such a situation, and allow some leeway. But they may not. While they may be sympathetic to your loss for a time, ultimately they will



expect you to keep up with your workload.”

“In general, I would not advise that a colleague be a person's main support system when they're going through such a loss,” Moskowitz says. “It can impact your colleagues' ability to perform their own work. It can also make them so uncomfortable that they avoid communicating with you. If you do confide in colleagues, choose those you know you can trust. Set a time to talk when it won't interfere with work.”

Who's best equipped to help?

No matter how close you are with your colleagues, it may be unreasonable to expect them to provide continual support in a busy work setting.

“Many people don't know what to say to someone who has just had a loss,” Moskowitz notes. “It's better to seek friends outside of

work who have given you permission to confide and who will let you express your full range of emotions. You want to have people around you who will allow and encourage you to talk about the person who died. They can help you reminisce, and get through first-year milestones like anniversaries, birthdays and holidays. Grief support groups can also be very effective. These can be lonely and sad times, especially if you don't have someone to talk to.”

Another good person to have in your support system is a bereavement counselor. This is a professional with special training who can help you through your own personal grief process in a safe and non-judgmental way.

The Faculty Assistance Program can offer grief counseling support and/or provide resources including referrals to qualified bereavement professionals and local hospice services with grief counseling and support groups. FAP professionals can also provide resources for those dealing with financial or

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*Allyson Moskowitz,
Good Shepherd Hospice*



Suddenly Single: What You Should Know

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legal issues following a spouse's death.

Reach out for help

Grief after a loss is normal. It can show up in unexpected ways.

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normal to feel emotions you never knew you had after someone dies. Reaching out to others can be hard to do, but it's necessary."

Expressing grief openly, in a safe setting, can help people work through the loss of a spouse. The goal is not to "get over" a loved one but to adjust to the new situation and eventually re-establish life without them.

"People need to talk

about the circumstances of their loved one's death, their feelings of loss, loneliness and sadness," Moskowitz says. "Keeping it inside will only prolong grief. We encourage them to be kind to themselves, and to be tolerant of the emotional roller coaster they will experience."

For those who are not comfortable seeking out counseling, or want to take additional positive self-help steps, bereavement experts encourage taking time for self-exploration, journaling and reading.

Know that it gets better

We know that the grieving process never really ends, but it can ease with time, willingness to share thoughts and emotions, and special attention to self-care, Moskowitz notes. "People reach a 'new normal,' and that is different for each person."

Resources

Chapters Health System

www.chaptershealth.org

Hospice care provided by LifePath Hospice (in Hillsborough County, Florida) and Good Shepherd Hospice (in Florida's Hardee, Highlands and Polk counties)

National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization *Caring Connections*

www.caringinfo.org

The Dougy Center

www.dougy.org/grief-resources/

Resources for children, teens, young adults and adults

Center For Loss & Life

Transition-Dr. Alan Wolfelt

www.centerforloss.com

Ask for help. People will tell you, "Let me know if there's anything I can do." Decide what you need and ask them.

Haven Hospice



Your Faculty Assistance Program: A Caring, Confidential Resource

We care about your wellbeing on and off the job. Your Faculty Assistance Program (FAP), administered by the professionals at Wood & Associates, is a confidential resource you can rely on, 24/7, when you need an assist during times of change, stress or crisis. This service is a faculty benefit. We're also a resource for helping you grow personally and professionally.

The FAP newsletter is provided as a benefit to USF Health faculty.

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Be Proactive—Share This Crucial Information Now

Every couple should talk about what-if scenarios and know where to find important information they might need in case of a medical crisis or sudden death.

"You shouldn't wait," says Heidi New-Crockford, Elder Care Consultant/Long Term Care Planner. "It's not something to put off because you think you are too young. What if your spouse or partner was severely injured in a car accident tomorrow and couldn't communicate with you? Would you know their preferences about whether they'd want heroic measures taken to keep them alive? Do you each have a medical power of attorney? What kind of final arrangements does each of you wish to have? Share all of this crucial information before a crisis occurs."

Use this list as a starting point for discussion. Record the information in a secure location that either partner can access quickly.

- Full legal name
- Social Security number
- Date and place of birth
- Names and addresses of relatives and close friends
- Location of birth certificate, certificates of marriage, divorce, citizenship and adoption (visit www.cdc.gov/nchs for information on requesting copies of death and marriage certificates)
- Employers and dates of employment
- Education and military records
- Sources of income and assets (pension funds, IRAs, 401ks, interest, etc.)
- Insurance policies, deeds and investments
- Investment income (stocks, bonds, property) and stock brokers' names and contact information
- Insurance information (life, health, long-term care, home and motor vehicle) with policy numbers and agents' names
- Name and bank account numbers (checking, savings and credit union)
- Location of safe deposit boxes and keys
- Copy of most recent income tax return
- Copy of will
- Name and contact information for attorney(s)
- Mortgages and debts (credit cards, private lenders, etc.) stating what is owed, to whom, and when payments are due
- Location of deed of trust and car title
- Property tax information
- Location of all personal items, such as jewelry, art and family heirlooms
- Online user names and passwords for bank and credit card accounts, email, Facebook and other social media