

Newly Widowed Checklist

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Some Things to Consider

In partnership with the Liz Logelin Foundation, the [Soaring Spirits Loss Foundation](#) has created a checklist for the newly widowed, or the friends and families of people who have recently lost a spouse. As organizations founded by other widowed people, we understand the trauma, fear, confusion, and loneliness that begins the instant your spouse dies. We want you to know that there is a network of support, built by people who have lived through this same experience, available to you. Though you may be too overwhelmed to need us now, we will be here whenever you do.

There are a few things that we wished someone would have told us as we waded through the paperwork that is necessary when someone dies. This list is not an all inclusive road map, is not intended to be used as legal advice nor should it be considered a substitute for a meeting with a duly-licensed estate attorney, but it will provide you with some tips that may make things easier in the weeks and months ahead.

1. Allow people to help you. They want to, and you will need them. Ask them if necessary.
2. Write things down. Your memory might be unreliable for some time.
3. Delegate. Many of the next items on this list can be done for you by someone else.
4. If you have a life insurance policy, contact your agent or company immediately. This will insure that you have funding for the funeral expenses, the funeral home often will coordinate with the life insurance company. Check with your employer regarding whether you have a bereavement leave benefit available.
5. Check with your spouse's employer to verify whether there is a company sponsored life insurance policy in place for your spouse, obtain the current information regarding any applicable 401K accounts, and check the status of your health insurance if your family was covered by your spouse's employer. There may be a grace period when you will still have coverage, but you will want to find out the exact date that any changes in coverage will apply. If you have joint investment accounts or investment accounts held in your spouse's name these will need to be addressed.

6. Get at least 5-10 certified copies of the death certificate. There are many agencies that will require an original document when they are notified of your recent loss. You will also need to carry a death certificate (and your child's birth certificate) with you if you are traveling internationally with a minor child. Be aware that you are charged a fee for each copy of the certificate that you order.
7. In you live in the US, notify your local Social Security Office and have your spouse's social security number on hand. *Warning: Many of us were horrified when we discovered that there was a one-time death benefit to surviving spouses of \$255. Obviously this amount does not come close to reflecting the value of a life. If you live outside of the US, please check the Liz Logelin Foundation resource page or contact the LLF for assistance with finding the social services information that applies to the country in which you live.
8. Have someone help you sort through office paperwork to look for personal accounts, outstanding appointments, upcoming trips that may need to be cancelled, or anything that must to be dealt with before a cancellation charge applies.
9. If applicable, locate your spouse's cell phone. Please note that you may want to preserve their voicemail message in another form, as it may be deleted accidentally if the phone malfunctions or the service contract is ended.
10. Make a complete list of your spouse's credit cards, debit cards, phone cards (checking their wallet is a good place to start), business expense accounts, and any other open account they may have. Each of these institutions needs to be notified of your spouse's death, and many will require a copy of the death certificate to validate your request to close the account. Also ask each company whether there is any applicable insurance that pays off the account in the event of a cardholder's death. Check auto loans, credit cards, and mortgages for this type of insurance.
11. Keep an open file within easy reach for your health insurance in case there are expenses associated with your loved one that are yet to be paid. You will also need to call the insurance company to inform them of your spouse's passing.
12. Check your utility bills to be sure all of your utilities are in both of your names. Most companies require your name to be on the account before you are able to act as administrator of the service. One thing to be aware of: companies often have to shut the service down and then restart it in order to change the name on the account.
13. Make banking changes, but you will need to do this after you have a death certificate in hand.

14. Cancel any recurring membership fees or annual magazine subscriptions that apply only to your spouse, and adjust any that applied to both of you.

15. Make changes to emergency contacts as necessary. The children's school contact form is especially hard to change, but also vitally important.

These are just a few of the things we have learned through our combined experiences. One other thing we know is that talking to other widowed people helps. Please don't hesitate to contact the Soaring Spirits Loss Foundation or the Liz Logelin Foundation using the contact information listed below.

We are here if you need us.

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