



**Navigating Life After Loss:  
A Comprehensive Guide for the Newly Widowed**

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## Introduction

Losing a spouse is an incredibly difficult experience—both emotionally and practically. This guide is designed to support you during the early stages of this transition and help you build a secure future. In the following pages, you will find clear checklists for the first week, first month, and guidance for the first year after your loss. Additionally, practical templates are provided to help you gather and keep track of key information and contacts.

## First Week: Immediate Steps

In the immediate aftermath, your focus should be on both self-care and addressing essential practical matters. The following checklist provides step-by-step guidance for this critical time.

- ☐ Obtain multiple copies of the death certificate (20-30 copies. More depending on your specific circumstances).
- ☐ Make funeral or memorial arrangements.
- ☐ Notify family and close friends.
- ☐ You will continue to have access to jointly held bank accounts and safe deposit boxes. If any accounts are in your spouse's name individually, determine if you are a designated beneficiary on the account (typically referred to as Payable on Death or P.O.D. If you are not a beneficiary, ask the financial institution for a form affidavit furnished by the financial institution that allows you access; close out the account if possible. If you can't access the by beneficiary designation or affidavit on a form provided by the institution, you may have to wait for the account to go through probate proceedings. In which case you will likely need to consult an attorney.
- ☐ Notify the Social Security Administration and apply for \$255 lump sum death benefit.
- ☐ If your spouse was a Veteran, contact the VA for burial and other potential benefits.
- ☐ Contact your spouse's employer (if applicable) to discuss benefits and final paycheck.
- ☐ Notify attorney, financial advisor, CPA and other appropriate professionals.



- ☐ Notify financial institutions (banks, credit unions, investment firms).
- ☐ Locate the will and estate documents.
- ☐ Secure all financial accounts to prevent unauthorized transactions.
- ☐ Cancel or transfer health insurance coverage.
- ☐ Ensure essential bills (mortgage, utilities, etc.) continue to be paid.
- ☐ Arrange care for dependents and pets, if applicable.
- ☐ Do not cancel digital accounts (email, social media, subscriptions) until access to necessary information is no longer needed.
- ☐ Do not cancel cell phone service until access to information and contacts are no longer needed.
- ☐ Assess immediate cash needs for funeral and living expenses.
- ☐ Seek emotional support from family, friends, or grief counseling.

## **First Month: Financial and Legal Steps**

During the first month, your focus shifts toward organizing your finances, engaging professional support, and initiating legal and estate planning. This checklist is designed to help you systematically address these areas.

- ☐ Meet with an estate attorney to review the will and probate process.
- ☐ Begin probate proceedings if necessary.
- ☐ Close or update joint financial accounts.
- ☐ Make claims on all life insurance policies and other assets naming you as beneficiary.
- ☐ Be aware, if the individual receives a deposit from Social Security in the month of passing, this deposit may be returned by the decedent's bank. A Social Security payment due a deceased beneficiary may be paid to a family member or legal representative of the estate by completing form SSA-1724.



- ☐ Any Social Security benefits received after death must be returned whether the Social Security Administration has been notified of the death or not.
- ☐ Review your spouse's debts and determine responsibilities.
- ☐ Cancel unnecessary subscriptions, memberships, and auto-payments.
- ☐ Consider applying for Social Security survivor benefits, if eligible. Consult a financial advisor knowledgeable in analyzing Social Security filing strategies.
- ☐ Update beneficiaries on financial accounts (IRAs, 401(k)s, annuities).
- ☐ Retitle property and vehicles in your name, if necessary.
- ☐ Consult a tax professional regarding estate, inheritance, and income tax implications.
- ☐ Meet with a financial advisor to reassess your financial situation.
- ☐ Inquire about employer survivor benefits (pension, retirement plans).
- ☐ Notify credit bureaus to prevent identity theft.
- ☐ Monitor financial accounts for any suspicious activity.
- ☐ Address any business interests and determine next steps.
- ☐ Review and negotiate outstanding medical bills.
- ☐ Decide how to manage your spouse's digital and online accounts.
- ☐ Evaluate your housing situation and future living arrangements.
- ☐ Update your own estate plan (will, trust, power of attorney).
- ☐ Seek professional grief counseling if needed.



## First Year: Long-Term Adjustments

As you move through the first year, it is essential to establish a long-term plan that aligns with your new goals and financial reality. Here's how you can build a strong foundation for your future:

- ☐ Adjust your financial plan to reflect single-income status.
- ☐ Reevaluate your investment strategy with a financial advisor.
- ☐ Update your tax filing status and develop a tax strategy.
- ☐ Decide on long-term housing needs (downsizing, relocating, etc.).
- ☐ Consolidate financial accounts to simplify management.
- ☐ Develop a plan for inherited assets.
- ☐ Establish or rebuild credit in your own name, if necessary.
- ☐ Remain vigilant against scams targeting widows/widowers.
- ☐ Rebuild your social network by engaging with friends and support groups.
- ☐ Update emergency contact information.
- ☐ Set new financial goals, including travel, philanthropy, or hobbies.
- ☐ Review healthcare and insurance needs (long-term care, Medicare options).
- ☐ Consider charitable contributions or establishing a memorial fund.
- ☐ Reassess estate planning strategies to reflect your new situation.
- ☐ Decide what to do with sentimental belongings (keep, donate, gift).
- ☐ Reevaluate work and retirement plans based on your financial situation.
- ☐ Seek out community groups or widow/widower support organizations.
- ☐ Prepare emotionally for anniversaries, birthdays, and holidays.
- ☐ Prioritize physical and mental well-being through self-care and hobbies.
- ☐ Embrace the next chapter by setting new personal and financial goals.



## **Additional Considerations**

- Contact religious or community organizations for support and guidance.
- Arrange for mail forwarding or update address information as needed.
- Cancel or update subscriptions for medications and notify pharmacies.
- Secure any firearms or high-value assets if necessary.
- Identify and close any safe deposit boxes held in your spouse's name.
- Determine responsibility for timeshares, club memberships, or rental properties.
- Update passport and travel documentation with new emergency contacts.
- Review and adjust estate distributions for heirs and beneficiaries.
- Plan for long-term healthcare and assisted living needs.
- Address business succession plans if your spouse owned a business.
- Reevaluate education funding plans for dependents or grandchildren.
- Adjust retirement withdrawal strategies to ensure financial stability.
- Consider therapy, grief retreats, or travel for emotional well-being.
- Review family dynamics and legal guardianship arrangements if necessary.
- Evaluate options for repurposing or liquidating inherited assets.
- Explore volunteer opportunities or new career paths for fulfillment.
- Consider joining widow/widower financial planning groups.
- Establish a plan for ongoing charitable donations in your spouse's memory.
- Research options for repurposing sentimental belongings into keepsakes.
- Set long-term lifestyle goals, focusing on personal growth and independence.




## Conclusion

This guide is designed to empower you during one of life's most challenging transitions. By following these step-by-step checklists and using the provided templates, you can manage immediate priorities while laying the groundwork for a confident and fulfilling future. At Blake Wealth Management, we are committed to guiding you every step of the way with over 25 years of experience and a deep passion for supporting women through life's transitions.

If you're seeking personalized guidance, please consider scheduling a consultation with our team. We are here to help you achieve financial confidence and peace of mind.

## Blake Wealth Management

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This is not an exhaustive list of considerations. You should have a meaningful discussion with, among other people, your financial advisor that goes beyond the topics covered here. Neither

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## Contacts

Add additional important contacts such as attorneys and business partners at the bottom.

[illegible]



## Medical Contacts

Add additional medical contacts such as specialists at the bottom.

[illegible]



## Financial Accounts

Account types can include checking, savings, retirement, investments and annuities.

[illegible]



## Insurance

Insurance types can include life, disability, long-term care, auto, home and umbrella.

[illegible]



## Debts and Liabilities

Debt and Liability types can include mortgage, auto, and credit cards.

[illegible]



## Internet Accounts

List online accounts with username and passwords.

[illegible]