



CANCERcare®

Inform®

CancerCare®

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Fact sheet

## Coping with the Loss of Your Partner or Spouse

The death of your partner or spouse is a life-changing experience. You probably find that you are experiencing many different losses, including the loss of your loved one's personality and uniqueness, of the role he or she had within the family, and of the routines that were so much a part of your daily life.

You may find it hard to balance the competing memories of your partner's death and the life you shared before cancer. Your energy, which was once so invested in caring for your partner, may seem to have lost its purpose. At the same time, you may be facing practical challenges, such as mounting bills or paper work related to your partner's death, along with new responsibilities. It may seem like you don't have enough time to grieve your loss or take care of yourself, or you may feel like you have too much time.

Here are some steps you can take to comfort yourself and keep your partner or spouse in your mind and heart.

**Have compassion for yourself.** Surround yourself with people who encourage you to be yourself and who recognize your feelings of sadness and happiness. Identify the people you can depend on for support. These may include family members, relatives, friends, a clergy person, members of support groups for people who have lost a loved one, and a social worker or other professionally trained counselor.

**Honor your grief.** You might consider lighting a candle or planting a tree or flowers in memory of your partner; enlarging a favorite photograph and displaying it in a prominent place in your home; participating in faith-based activities that help memorialize your partner; or setting aside the same time each day and using it to think about your partner or listen to music you enjoyed together.



**Create a remembrance photo album or scrapbook.** Photographs of your partner can help you remember how he or she looked before cancer and the life you shared together.

**Keep a journal.** Recall the events and special times that were significant for the two of you. Think back to the tough times you helped each other through before cancer. Record your partner's history and legacy by identifying the accomplishments he or she was most proud of, places the person loved, and favorite foods, scents, holidays and stories.

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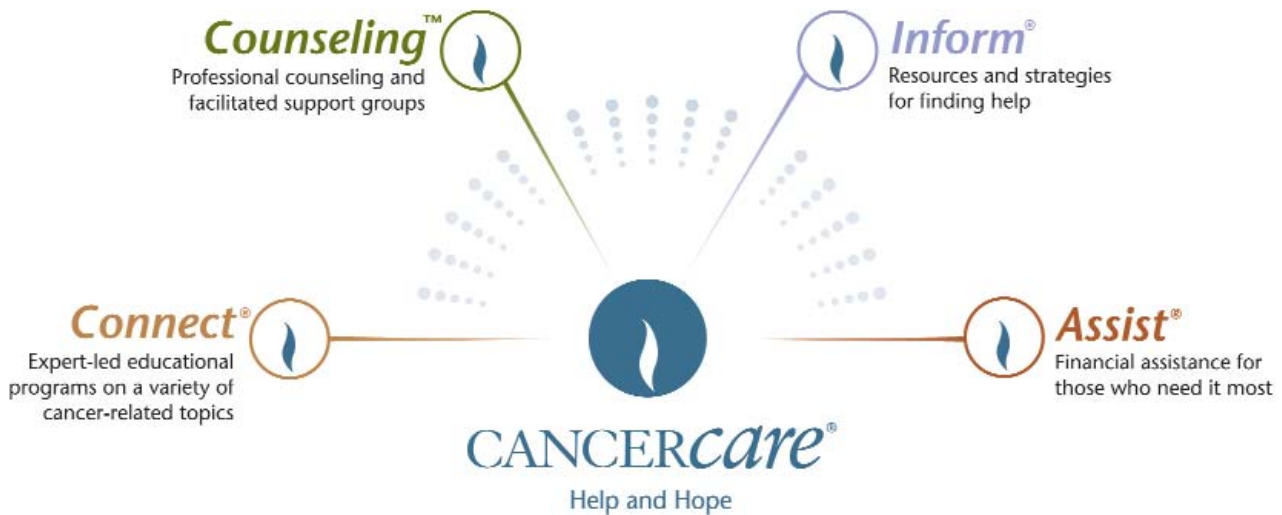
**Give yourself credit for all your efforts to provide comfort to your partner.** Make a list of all of the things you did to help your spouse or partner. Value the time you spent with your loved one while he or she was sleeping or resting. Remember the many times you talked with doctors and nurses on their behalf. Recall the special treats you offered to try to get your spouse or partner to eat something. Acknowledge all time you spent learning about your partner's cancer and treatment options. These are some of the many things you did that provided comfort and support for your partner.

Grieving the loss of a spouse or partner is not about moving on with your life. It's about cherishing your memories of your loved one while being open to new experiences that could enrich your life.

## CANCERCARE CAN HELP

CancerCare's professional oncology social workers understand the complex needs of individuals who are grieving and help you find ways to cope with your grief experience. We offer individual and group counseling by telephone, online, or in person. CancerCare also offers education, information and referrals to other resources to help you and your family members cope and heal.

### *The CancerCare® Constellation of Services*



CancerCare's services are provided  
free of charge to anyone affected by cancer

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