



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. Grieving the loss of a spouse or partner is about cherishing your memories of your loved one while remaining open to new experiences that may enrich your life.

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

Have compassion for yourself. The loss of a partner or spouse is a traumatic event. Allow yourself to feel conflicting emotions. At times you may feel that you don't have enough time to grieve your loss or take care of yourself. At other times, you may feel that you have too much time. You may also find it hard to balance the competing memories of your partner's death and the life you shared before cancer. You may feel as though you are going through many different losses at the same time, such as:

- The loss of your loved one's personality and uniqueness.
- The loss of the role he or she had in your family.
- The loss of the routines that were so much a part of your daily life.

Rest assured that such feelings are a normal part of the grieving process.

Get help with practical matters. You may be facing practical challenges, such as mounting bills or paperwork related to your partner's death, along with new responsibilities. A family lawyer or other trusted advisor may be able to offer counsel and guidance.

Seek support. Surround yourself with people who encourage you to be yourself and who recognize your feelings. Identify people whom you can depend on for support. These may include:

- Family members and friends.
- A clergy person.
- Members of a support group for people who have lost a loved one.
- A social worker or other trained counselor. CancerCare offers free individual and group counseling for people who are grieving the loss of a partner or spouse.



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Give it time. There is no timetable for grief. Although you will never stop missing your partner, as time passes your pain will ease and you will be able to go on with your life.

Honor your loved one. Do something special to honor your partner's memory. For example, 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 your home.
- Taking part in faith-based activities to honor your partner's memory.
- Setting aside a time each day to think about your partner or listen to music you enjoyed together.



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

Keep a journal. Try to put your feelings and memories down on paper. Recall events and times that were important 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 that he or she was most proud of.
- Places he or she loved.
- Favorite foods, scents, holidays, and stories.

Recognize 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 your partner's behalf. Recall the special treats you offered to try to get your partner to eat something. Acknowledge all the 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.

CancerCare Can Help

CancerCare's professional oncology social workers are available to help you find ways to cope with grief. We provide free individual counseling and support groups over the telephone, online and in person. CancerCare also offers practical help and referrals to other resources. For more information, call **1-800-813-HOPE (4673)** or visit www.cancer.org.



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