

Loss of a partner
Large print version

Cruse
Bereavement
Support

When a partner, husband or wife dies

Losing your husband, wife or partner is one of the most intense and emotional experiences in life. Whatever way you would describe your relationship, it's a huge loss in your life. Your world as you knew it has changed, and it can be incredibly painful.

Different feelings after a partner dies

Loneliness

If you lived with your partner the fact that they are not with you is impossible to forget, and losing that companionship is very hard. There's now an empty space at the table. If you shared a bed, even trying to sleep is a reminder of what you have lost.

Loss of intimacy

Many people find the loss of a physical or sexual relationship hard to bear. It's understandable to miss the intimacy and closeness of your partner. Talking about this

may feel particularly difficult or inappropriate but it can help to do so with someone you trust, or with us.

Feeling someone's presence

It's possible to feel like the person who has died is actually with you. You might smell or hear or even see your partner following their death. For some people this can be very reassuring, and for others disturbing. It usually becomes less common and stops over time.

Physical effects

Grief doesn't just affect our emotions but also affects our health. It's common to suffer headaches, weight changes, sleep disturbance or fatigue. Your resistance to illness may be lowered and you might find yourself more likely to catch minor illnesses. If symptoms persist or you are struggling to cope seek help from your GP.

Other changes and losses

The loss of your partner can bring a number of other changes and losses. You face a change of identity from one of a couple to a single person. You may feel pain at the loss of future dreams and how you pictured your life to be in the future. You may face financial difficulties if you have lost a second or primary income and you may have increased family and household responsibility. It

may affect your health. Sorting out these issues can take a lot of time and energy.

When an ex-partner dies

The death of an ex-partner or spouse is a unique and often confusing experience. You may feel shocked, sad, confused or nothing at all. It's important to allow space for your feelings no matter what they are.

If you had a difficult relationship with your ex-partner after your separation, you may feel a sense of longing or regret. Maybe you still had feelings for the person but they are in a new relationship, or maybe you felt there was a lot left you would have liked to say to them.

When someone dies, support is often focused on the current partner or children of the person who died. Ex-partners can be left out of the grieving process, even if they were with the person for a long time.

New relationships

In time some people feel pressure to find a new relationship, especially, but not always, if you are bereaved relatively young. This pressure may come from ourselves or those around us. Usually other people mean well, but the decision ultimately needs to rest with you, and what feels right for you at that time.

After time has passed you might be ready to introduce someone new into your life. Others do not feel ready for many years, or never. It's important to make the decision that's right for you. If you have children you will also want to weigh up what it means for them. What would it mean to introduce someone new into their lives?

What can help

Remember your partner

Even if someone close dies, the memory of them does not die. Your relationship continues even if they're no longer alive. It can help to think of ways you can keep your partner as part of your life. This might mean organising a special event in their honour or creating a small memorial for them in the home.

Get support with children

If you have young children or teenagers at home you can read about how they may react and how to help them in our factsheet about children and grief.

Anniversaries and reminders

Birthdays, holidays, anniversaries and special days can be very difficult after a partner dies. It can help to think in advance about how you are going to manage.

Looking after yourself

It's important to pay attention to your own health and wellbeing. It can be difficult, but try to keep to a routine of eating, sleeping and getting a little bit of exercise.

Practical and financial matters

If you are struggling financially make sure you are receiving all the benefits you can claim. Citizen's Advice or other community organisations may also be able to offer advice.

For more support call our helpline

0808 808 1677