

What to Do After the Death of a Loved One

The death of a loved one is an emotional event. Having to deal with personal loss is compounded by a host of legal and financial issues that must also be addressed. No one is ever quite prepared for either.

This checklist is designed to help you navigate many of those issues in a systematic way.

Immediately Following Loss	Done	Responsible	Notes
Contact family members, friends and loved ones.	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Contact your employer, if applicable, to arrange bereavement leave.	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Make sure personal residences are secure and set up care for any pets. <i>Note: Important information and personal items should be put away.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Review the written wishes of the deceased.	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Engage the funeral home/funeral director.	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Draft an obituary and send to the appropriate newspapers/publishers.	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Organize the funeral service.	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Arrange burial, interment or cremation.	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Complete funeral expense payment arrangements.	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Access safety deposit boxes, if applicable.	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Determine where emergency loans might come from – personal loan from a relative or friend, Red Cross (especially if spouse was a veteran), Salvation Army, etc.	<input type="checkbox"/>		
If deceased was a business owner, make provisions for the short-term continuation of the business.	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Notify clubs, fraternal organizations, alumni offices and other associates of the death.	<input type="checkbox"/>		

Next Steps: Getting Organized & Ensuring Continuity	Done	Responsible	Notes
Gather and organize the appropriate records: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Birth certificate • Marriage certificate • Divorce decree • Military service documents • Death certificate (recommend 8-10 copies; funeral home will generally help with this) • Life insurance policies • Investment documents • Estate plan documents (will, trust, powers of attorney, healthcare directive, prenuptial agreement, etc.) • Tax information • Employee benefits information 	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Contact appropriate trusted advisors: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attorney • Accountant/tax advisor • Insurance professional • Other(s) 	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Pay necessary bills for credit cards, utilities, car loans, property tax, insurance premiums and the mortgage. Note: <i>If spouse was drawing a salary or collecting Social Security, it will stop immediately. Plan and spend cautiously the first few months.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Change direct deposits and automatic bill payments, as needed.	<input type="checkbox"/>		

<p>Claim available benefits and/or notify appropriate agencies.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social Security survivor's benefits • Social Security death benefits • Medicare or other health insurance benefits • Federal employee benefits • Civil service benefits • State government employee benefits • Military/veteran's benefits • Deceased spouse employee benefits • Qualified retirement plan/IRA benefits 	<input type="checkbox"/>		
<p>Contact post office with forwarding information, if necessary. Cancel all deliveries of newspapers, home care services and any standing appointments, if applicable.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
<p>Cancel services that are no longer needed: cable, internet, etc. Do not cancel utilities that may still be needed.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>		

Insurance Considerations	Done	Responsible	Notes
<p>Notify long-term care insurers.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
<p>File claims with insurance companies.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual life insurance policies • Group life insurance policies • Employer-based life insurance policies • Accidental death and dismemberment policies • Travel insurance policies • Mortgage life insurance policies • Credit life insurance policies 	<input type="checkbox"/>		

Re-evaluate surviving spouse's insurance needs, if applicable. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Life insurance • Health insurance • Disability insurance • Homeowners insurance • Auto insurance • Liability insurance • Long-term care insurance 	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Review and change as appropriate beneficiary designations for insurance policies.	<input type="checkbox"/>		

Settling the Estate	Done	Responsible	Notes
Contact the executor/administrator, trustee(s), guardians and heirs.	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Contact the attorney and/or other advisor(s).	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Gather the appropriate records.	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Determine if probate is necessary.	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Obtain a Taxpayer Identification Number (TIN).	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Notify credit reporting agencies and ensure the deceased's credit reports are frozen.	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Close credit card accounts and cancel memberships.	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Notify creditors and lenders.	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Transfer utilities into surviving spouse's name.	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Notify other institutions.	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Create a plan for distributing assets to heirs as appropriate or required.	<input type="checkbox"/>		
File appropriate tax returns.	<input type="checkbox"/>		

Surviving Spouse's Estate Planning Concerns	Done	Responsible	Notes
Prepare or update a will.	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Create or amend a trust.	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Prepare or update a financial durable power of attorney.	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Prepare or update advanced medical directives. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Healthcare durable power of attorney • Living will • Healthcare proxy or directive 	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Update, as appropriate, beneficiary designations for existing IRAs and retirement plans.	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Prepare letters of instruction.	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Review plan for estate tax.	<input type="checkbox"/>		

Tax Planning Concerns	Done	Responsible	Notes
Contact a tax advisor.	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Evaluate a change in filing status.	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Consider the tax consequences of making gifts.	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Ensure step up in basis occurs (DOD or alternate valuation date).	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Determine if the surviving spouse will have inherited retirement plan assets (required minimum distributions needed, income in respect of a descendant, etc.).	<input type="checkbox"/>		

Reassessing the Financial Situation	Done	Responsible	Notes
Retitle jointly owned assets. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Real estate • Vehicles • Bank accounts • Investments 	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Transfer individually-owned assets. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Real estate • Vehicles • Bank accounts • Investments 	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Retitle or transfer retirement accounts. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IRAs • Roth IRAs • Employer-sponsored plans • Annuities • Health Savings Accounts 	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Re-evaluate budget. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Income sources • Expenses: fixed, variable, discretionary 	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Review other financial goals/needs. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Readjustment period • Emergency fund • New home • Retirement • College/529s • Weddings • Vacations • Other purchases 	<input type="checkbox"/>		

Discuss survivor's credit situation.

- Obtain credit reports.
- Contact existing creditors.
- Establish separate credit if necessary.

