

Family Caregiver Health Bulletin



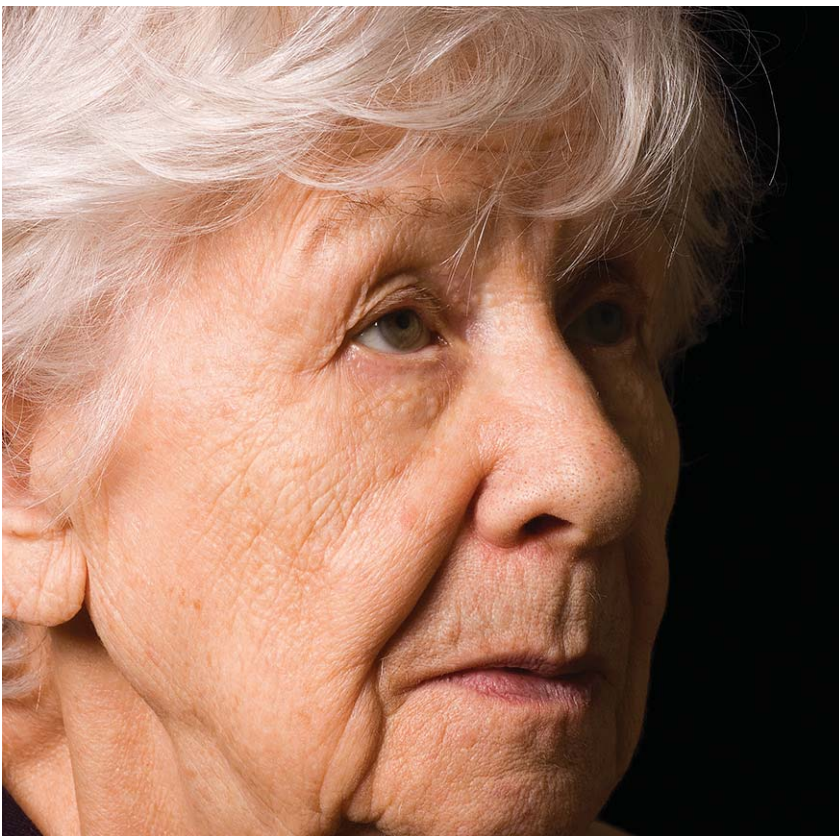
JANUARY 2016

Download this and past issues of the Adult, Youth, Parent and Family Caregiver Health Bulletins:
<http://fcs-hes.ca.uky.edu/content/health-bulletins>

Reprinted by:
K-State Research & Extension
Atchison County Office
405 Main/PO Box 109
Effingham, KS 66023
913-833-5450

THIS MONTH'S TOPIC:

COPING WITH THE DEATH OF A SPOUSE



Losing a spouse is a difficult and painful loss to bear. With such a death, there is often a sense of losing a part of oneself which can be overwhelming as it leaves the surviving spouse feeling alone, isolated and incomplete. For some, the world seems surreal as people you know keep moving and living, while your disbelief and disorientation keeps you watching from a distance or simply going through the motions with little to no feelings. With such raw emotion, it is not uncommon to feel confused or as if you cannot cope. At times you may not even want to try. Instead, you may cry a great deal and feel sad, despair and exhaustion. Such depressed moods and behavior are normal aspects of grief associated with the death of a spouse.

According to Abbey Hospice, it is normal for spouses to feel:

Continued on the back 

It is important for you to grieve in a way that is healthy and helpful to you and to know that there is no script for this.

Continued from page 1

- **Lost.** Spouses are often best friends, especially after years of marriage. As a result, multiple losses are experienced including the loss of companionship, shared activities and language, intimacy and your number one fan and supporter.
- **Angry.** When the person you trusted and depended on most “leaves” you, it is not uncommon to feel deserted.
- **Guilty.** When someone is gone, it is normal to think about all of the things that you wish you “would have,” “could have” or “should have” done.
- **Old.** When we become pre-occupied with death, we tend to take on feelings of being old and/or thinking about our own deaths more than ever.
- **Sick.** When you are grieving, you are at greater risk of not taking care of yourself and you become more susceptible to health issues that interrupt physiological, emotional, social and mental health. Such disturbances may include problems with sleeping, eating disorders, lack of physical activity, chest pain or heart palpitations, indigestion and headaches.
- **Afraid.** Being alone can cause fear of conducting daily activities and routines by yourself, fear of taking care of yourself and fear of the future.
- **Worry.** Financial complications, insufficient resources or lack of knowledge or comfort regarding financial matters can consume widows and cause feelings such as “anxiety, fear, shame and anger.”

To properly cope with loss and the many feelings associated with losing a spouse, however, it is important for you to express your positive and negative feelings and thoughts.

- **Excluded.** Being a widow is a reminder that you are now half a couple in what may have been a “couple’s world.” You may feel excluded from or exclude yourself from important social groups that revolved around other couples or you may choose not to do things as a single person. Some surviving spouses find it easier to mingle with new people or people who did not know their spouse.
- **Relief.** After terminal illnesses, health conditions that caused distress or life experiences that jeopardized the quality of the relationship such as abusive relationship or chronic addiction, relief can be a difficult emotion to shoulder as it is often followed by guilt.

How to cope

Much of the way in which a surviving spouse will act and feel depends on personality, the nature of and duration of the marital relationship, the cause of death, previous experience with loss and death and the surviving spouse’s age and gender. To properly cope with loss and the many feelings associated with losing a spouse, however, it is important for you to express your positive and negative feelings and thoughts. It is important for you to grieve in a way that is healthy and helpful to you and to know that there is no script for this. Some spouses will want to talk about their loss for a very long time and this is okay. It is important and healthy to talk about your spouse and your feelings.

REFERENCE:

Abbey Hospice. (2015). Retrieved November 16, 2015 from http://www.abbeyhospice.com/AbbeyHospice/Bereavement_files/Spouse.pdf. Rewritten from Staudacher, C. (1987). *Beyond Grief: A Guide for Recovering from the Death of Loved One*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger.

SOURCE:

Abbey Hospice. Rewritten by Amy F. Hosier, Family Life Extension Specialist, with permission from Abbey Hospice.

Family Caregiver
Health Bulletin

Written by: Amy Hosier, Ph.D.
Extension Specialist for Family Life
Edited by: Connee Wheeler
Designed by: Rusty Manseau
Stock images: 123RF.com

