



For Grief

Spouse & Partner Loss

By Jenny Lisk, author of *Future Widow* & Host of *The Widowed Parent Podcast*

Dear Friend,

I'm so sorry you're needing this information about spouse and partner loss. At the same time, I'm so glad you found it.

I am also a widowed person. My husband, Dennis, died of brain cancer six years ago when our kids were nine and eleven years old. I lost my partner and my kids' dad, and I was devastated. I knew I'd need support in so many aspects of this very unexpected journey — and I didn't know where to find it.

You Are Not Alone

Many widowed people I speak with feel very alone. You may be feeling alone, too. This is especially true if someone is young(er) when their spouse dies. Even if they have supportive friends and family, they often don't know any other widowed people, and their kids may not have any friends who lost a parent.

As it turns out, there are actually many widowed people in all decades of life. One trip to Camp Widow (see resources, below) and you'll experience that for yourself. It's really quite amazing to spend time with others who “get it”—even if their losses and experiences are not exactly the same as your own.

I encourage you to find your “people,” those who can sit with you through the highs and lows of the days, weeks, months, and years to come. It will make all the difference.

The Way Out is Through

If you are reading this in hopes of finding just the right information to “fix” your grief, I have bad news. There is no magic solution. We grieve because we love, and we grieve for all sorts of complex reasons, too. There's no “quick fix” when we're talking about grief.

That said, there are some approaches that are typically deemed *unhelpful* when experiencing

grief. Avoiding your grief altogether is one. Attempting to numb the pain is another. Assuming you can find a quick fix, or skip grieving altogether, is yet another.

This is why it's often said that *the best way out is through*. If you allow yourself to grieve (whatever that looks like for you), allow yourself to feel whatever you are feeling, and don't try to rush the process, you may find that this turns out to be the most helpful path forward, toward a time in the future when you're feeling less bad and things feel more manageable.

Back to Basics

It's also important to tend to the basics of life when you're grieving: sleep, water, and food. Will these things lessen your grief? No. But the opposite is likely to make everything *more* difficult: poor nutrition and hydration will probably make you feel physically worse than you already do, and lack of sleep tends to make *everything* harder.

It can be difficult to tend to these necessities when you're grieving. Perhaps you can appoint a friend to coordinate meal delivery and make sure your refrigerator stays stocked with healthy snacks. You could use technology to remind you to drink enough water, such as setting an alarm on your phone or using an app to track. Or get one of those large water bottles with measurements marked on the side, which can help you make sure you're getting enough. And, when it comes to sleep, remember: naps can be your friend.

Whatever approach you take, being mindful of your body's basic needs will help you avoid adding to your struggles at this difficult time.

Find Support

It can also be helpful to seek out support when you're grieving the loss of your spouse or partner. Keep in mind that support can take many forms, and that not every approach is right for every person.

Some people prefer traditional grief groups. These may be organized by age or gender, by cause of death (cancer loss or suicide loss, for example), or by type of loss (spouse loss, child loss, sibling loss, and more). Some groups are more general in nature, for all grieving people. You may be able to find a group near you by calling local hospices, hospitals, cancer centers, or churches. See also the resources section, below, for a website where you can type in your zip code and find programs near you. Locating a grief group and finding out the logistics of attending is an excellent chore to assign to a friend who has offered to help with whatever you may need.

Keep in mind that traditional grief groups are not for everyone. Some people prefer to

channel their grief into action, such as participating in a fundraising effort or charity walk that feels meaningful. Others grieve by organizing friends to raise funds and build a bench, beautify a playground, or plant a tree in memory of their spouse. The possibilities are endless, and taking action can be a meaningful way to grieve.

Many people find the support they are looking for in books and podcasts. Books by grief experts, and interviews with them, can bring just the right information at the right time, and can do so in the comfort of your own home. Widow memoirs, and interviews with their authors, can provide reflections and insights, and hearing these stories can help us feel so much less alone. A good book or podcast can be immensely helpful, and I've listed some of my favorites below. If reading feels daunting right now, audiobooks can be a great option.

Finally, for some people, a one-on-one relationship with a therapist turns out to be the most helpful. If you don't find someone you "click" with, it's worth it to try again and again until you find the right person.

There is not one right way to find support after your spouse dies. No approach is right for everyone. The question is: which is right for *you*?

A Word About Friends, Family, Neighbors, and Colleagues

Many grieving people have heard a familiar refrain from the people around them: *Let me know if there's anything I can do to help.*

It's always said with the best of intentions. The person truly does want to help—they probably just don't know how.

It can be helpful to appoint someone close to you—a family member or friend—to be the "point person" to receive and coordinate offers of help. Then, if someone asks how they can help, you can just thank them and send them to this person for an assignment.

It is also likely that you'll have some awkward encounters, or even get some really insensitive comments. People are generally *trying* to be supportive, and really just don't know what to say. They may not realize that their questions and comments are unhelpful, or even rude.

Consider asking a friend to help you brainstorm, in advance, some deflections to questions or comments you may not feel comfortable discussing. This could include questions about how your partner died, platitudes such as "everything happens for a reason" or "she wouldn't want you to be sad," or unhelpful comments like "you're so young, I'm sure you'll find someone again."

Yes, all of these things have been said to people who have lost their spouses—so if you're prepared with a short response (or non-response), it can help make these encounters a bit less hard on you.

I've included a resource for Grief Allies below. Feel free to send your friends to it so you don't have to educate them on the basics of supporting grieving people.

Taking Care of Business

Sadly, after a spouse or partner dies, there are many practical and logistical tasks that must be attended to. Some are more urgent than others, and none are likely how you want to spend your time when you're grieving.

This is another great area to enlist the help of a friend. Ask someone to create a list of what needs to be done and triage the most important items. A trusted friend can do much of the research and legwork for you, and present you with only the items that critically need your personal attention at a time when you may have very little energy for decision-making or administrative work.

I've included a resource below, Widow 411, which is an excellent place for you or your friend to start figuring out what must be done and what can wait.

I'm so very sorry you've found yourself in this place of losing your spouse or partner. I wish I could fix it for you, but, of course, I can't. I hope the information and resources here will help as you begin to grieve the loss of your loved one.

And, please remember—you are not alone.

All my best wishes, from one widowed person to another,
Jenny Lisk

Some of My Favorite Resources

There are many resources for grieving people. Here are a few of my favorites for those who have been widowed.

Grief Books

- [*The AfterGrief: Finding Your Way Along the Long Arc of Loss*](#), by Hope Edelman
- [*Anxiety: The Missing Stage of Grief*](#), by Claire Bidwell Smith
- [*Grieving Beyond Gender: Understanding the Ways Men and Women Mourn*](#), by Kenneth J. Doka & Terry L. Martin
- [*It's OK That You're Not OK: Meeting Grief and Loss in a Culture That Doesn't Understand*](#), by Megan Devine
- [*Passed and Present: Keeping Memories of Loved Ones Alive*](#), by Allison Gilbert

Widow Memoirs

- [*Black Widow: A Sad-Funny Journey Through Grief for People Who Normally Avoid Books with Words Like "Journey" in the Title*](#), by Leslie Gray Streeter
- [*From Scratch: A Memoir of Love, Sicily, and Finding Home*](#), by Tembi Locke
- [*Future Widow: Losing My Husband, Saving My Family, and Finding My Voice*](#), by Jenny Lisk
- [*Widowish: A Memoir*](#), by Melissa Gould
- [*You Can't Do It Alone: A Widow's Journey Through Loss, Grief and Life After*](#), by Maria Quiban Whitesell

Podcasts

- [*Grief Out Loud*](#)
- [*The Widowed Parent Podcast*](#)

Organizations

- [*Camp Widow*](#)
- [*Modern Loss*](#)
- [*Modern Widows Club*](#)
- [*National Alliance for Children's Grief*](#)
- [*Soaring Spirits*](#)
- [*TAPS*](#) (for military families)

Practical Tips & Resources

- [*Find grief support near you*](#)
- [*Widow 411*](#)
- [*Tips for Grief Allies*](#)

About Jenny Lisk

Jenny Lisk is an award-winning author and widowed mom who is dedicated to helping widowed parents increase their family's well-being.

In her book, *Future Widow*, Jenny draws on her personal and professional experience to provide a real-life guide for surviving and thriving while raising grieving children.

As host of *The Widowed Parent Podcast*, Jenny has done more than 100 interviews with experts, seasoned widowed parents, and people who lost a parent at a young age. Her podcast brings much-needed resources to parents, helping them feel less lost and alone.

Connect with her at jennylink.com.