



THE **COMPASS** CHURCH

LOSS OF A LOVED ONE

FINANCIAL

GUIDE

CHECKLIST

FINANCIAL SUGGESTIONS AFTER THE LOSS OF A LOVED ONE

The guidance below is presented as a general starting point for your consideration. Your specific situation may best be served by qualified professionals. Consulting with certified probate and estate planning attorneys as well as a trusted financial professional could prove wise and helpful.

If you do not have a trusted financial professional, you can follow this link to the [Kingdom Advisors Directory](#) of competent professionals who are receiving ongoing biblical training and are committed to technical competency, ethical standards, and they personally give and steward their own finances.

THIS GUIDE SUGGESTS THREE CATEGORIES OF STEPS TO FOLLOW

1. Immediate Actions
2. Actions after Death Certificates Arrive
3. Actions over time (4-6 weeks after passing)

STEP 1: IMMEDIATE ACTIONS

ASK A TRUSTED FRIEND TO HELP WITH THESE STEPS

- Trusted Advisor(s):** Who is a trusted and knowledgeable friend or advisor to help think through these following issues?
NAME(S): _____
- Family Who Need To Be Involved:** Who (family, friends, etc.) need to be involved in the immediate decision-making process?
NAME(S): _____
- Decedent's Car:** Do not let family members drive a car that was solely titled to the decedent. Should an accident happen, the estate would be at risk of a lawsuit.
- Autopay Bills:** Create a list of bills that are paid automatically.
- Bank Accounts:** If accounts are joint, keep using the account as your own. Do not immediately begin closing accounts. You may need the decedent's name on the account to conduct estate business.
- Credit Cards:** You cannot use a credit card that is not in your name. Stop using plastic in your late spouse's name. When you receive credit card bills only in the name of your late spouse and do not have the means to pay, you will want to advise the lender of the death and wait for the estate probate process, which may be months away. If the account was jointly in your name, you can continue to use it and pay the bill by the due date each month.
- Health Insurance:** Check the status of your health insurance if your family was covered by your loved one's employer. Find out what changes need to be made to ensure your family's continuing health insurance. Keep an open file within easy reach for medical expenses associated with your loved one that is yet to be paid.
- Homeowners Insurance:** Make sure the homeowners' insurance company knows of death as soon as possible.
- Life Insurance:** If you may have trouble paying funeral expenses, notify life insurance immediately. Funeral homes will often coordinate with life insurance.

- Bereavement Leave:** Ask your employer if you have a bereavement leave benefit.
- Bills in Mail:** Save all bills you receive in the mail.
- Cell Phone:** Locate your loved one's cell phone. You may want to preserve their voicemail message in another form, should the phone be misplaced or service ends.
- User Names and Passwords:** Locate your loved one's list of user names and passwords. This link provides a helpful [List of Accounts to Cancel When A Loved One Dies](#).
- Upcoming Appointments and Trips to Cancel:** Ask a trusted friend or family member to help sort through appointments and upcoming trips that may need to be canceled.
- Military Veterans:** If a military veteran, determine if death benefits or funeral in a national cemetery with honors are available (possibly for both the veteran and their spouse). va.gov
- Safe Deposit Box:** You may access it only if your name is on the rental agreement. If not, you may need to work with the bank to obtain the last will and testament if in the box.

STEP 2: ACTIONS AFTER DEATH CERTIFICATES ARRIVE

- Banks:** Make changes to joint accounts, placing them in your name when advised by your attorney and or tax advising Certified Public Accountant (CPA).
- Emergency Contacts:** Change as necessary and appropriate.
- Health Insurance:** Notify Medicare and other health insurance companies that you will no longer pay your loved one's premiums.
- Life Insurance:** Submit a certified death certificate for each policy.
- Memberships:** Cancel any recurring membership fees and automatic bank drafts or magazine subscriptions that apply only to your loved one and adjust any that still apply to you.
- Pensions and Retirement Accounts:** Again, it is crucial to make the correct decision, so you should consult with an objective advisor. Before applying for benefits, consult with a financial professional.
- Retirement and Investment Accounts (401k, 403b, IRA's and Roth IRA's):** It is wise to consult with a trusted financial professional before making any decisions. Make sure you fully understand the pros and cons of the options before you. Options for transferring these accounts will vary based on your situation. It is crucial to make the correct decision. Once you know and understand the best solution for each account, submit a death certificate to each account custodian.
- Social Security Benefits:** Like 401K's and IRA's, it is crucial to make the correct decision. You should consult with a trusted financial professional before contacting social security for benefits. Social Security can be reached at this website and phone number - www.ssa.gov 1-800-772-1213. The link to this article describes [the difference between retirement and survivor benefits](#). This linked page describes [Social Security Survivor Benefits](#).
- Utility Bills:** Check all of your current utility bills to verify that they include your name on the bill. Be aware that sometimes when the name on an account changes, service may be shut down and then restarted in order to change the account name.

STEP 3: ACTIONS OVER TIME (4 TO 6 WEEKS AFTER PASSING)

- Accounts:** Check your loved one's wallet and make a complete list of credit cards, debit cards, business expense accounts, and any other open accounts. Ask each card company if there is a death benefit.
- Important Documents:** Find birth and marriage certificates, military discharge papers, car titles, legal documents such as wills, trusts, and estate documents and keep them in a safe place, ready for your attorney when the appointment comes to meet with them.

Know your expenses and income

Stay current with mortgage or rent, utilities, any car loan payments, property tax, and insurance premiums.

Make a list of your income sources: Social Security, pension payments, dividends, interest, job earnings, and IRA distributions.

Write down your fixed expenses such as groceries, mortgage payments, utilities, and insurance. Are there automatic charges on your credit card?

Check for reoccurring payments set up online or made consistently via checks.

Do not throw away unpaid bills.

Bottom line: What are your ongoing living expenses and what income is there to cover these?

If your loved one kept the finances, do you understand their organization system? Make it easy for yourself. Try using colored folders with headings such as banking, home bills, credit cards, investments, insurance, and estate documents.

If you are having trouble getting through these details, a trusted financial professional can help. Here again, is a link to the [Kingdom Advisor Directory](#).

- Savings:** If you have the ability, set aside cash in a separate account to cover 3 to 6 months of living expenses. Do not make any significant decisions that change the course of your investment strategy until you allow enough time (usually many months up to a couple of years) to adjust from the "grieving fog" created by your changing life situation.
- Health Insurance:** If you were receiving health coverage under your loved one's employer plan, you may be able to continue on the group plan for 36 months through COBRA coverage. An employer with fewer than 20 employees is not required to provide COBRA coverage. Ask the plan administrator if the company will continue picking up the employer's premium subsidy.
- Life Insurance:** If you can't find life insurance policies and you don't have an insurance agent, scan checking account transactions and bank statements for payments to insurance companies over the preceding 12 months. Check auto loans and mortgages for a death benefit. Your spouse may have had a group life insurance policy through a professional or fraternal organization. There are multiple Insurance Policy Locator Services online.
**NOTE: Talk to a professional before using one of these services. There may be a fee for such a service.*
- Estate and Probate:** Until you meet with your estate lawyer, hold off on placing your loved one's assets in your own name. If you touch assets in your loved one's name, you'll lose any opportunity to "disclaim" the property -- that is, allowing those assets to go directly to your children or other heirs. If you forgo these assets, they will not count against your federal or state estate tax exemption when you die. Assuming you had named your spouse to make financial and health-care decisions on your behalf in the event you became incapacitated, you will need to designate a new "agent" for your financial power of attorney, health-care power of attorney, and a health-care directive.

Organize bills related to funeral/burial/cremation expenses. Ask your estate attorney about returning vehicles or boats to the lender that were only in the name of your loved one.

You will normally have choices regarding how you will receive the money. Read the fine print carefully. In some cases, an insurance company will place your funds into its own money-market funds and send a book of checks. Turn down this option, and place the money in a federally insured bank account or a money-market fund. Money in a federally-insured bank account is insured up to \$250,000 per account. If you're considering guaranteed monthly payments for life, seek the advice of your lawyer or financial adviser.

- Taxes:** The amount of time from the date of death until a final federal income tax return varies based on the situation. Please see [IRS Pub. 559](#)
- If your spouse was still working at the time of death:** Were there any unpaid salary or bonuses, accrued vacation, and sick pay, leftover funds in a medical flexible spending account, or stock options?
- Annuities:** Assuming your spouse was retired and you were both receiving monthly pension benefits in the form of a joint and survivor annuity, notify the plan administrator as soon as possible. Check with companies holding annuities and apply for benefits if applicable. Depending on the type of annuity you chose, you could be due 50%, 75%, or 100% of what both of you were receiving before your spouse died. If your plan only pays 50% after the loss of your spouse and the plan keeps paying 100%, they will expect you to return the overpayment.
- Cars, trucks, boats & RV's:** Notify the motor vehicle department and change titles to include boats, RV's that were owned free and clear.
- Other investments not in a retirement account:** Notify stock brokerage houses and investment companies.
- Memberships:** Cancel and close fraternal groups, clubs, or other memberships.
- Medical:** Finalize hospital, doctor, and nursing home bills. Contact Medicare for final medical bills if the person was over age 65.
- Unclaimed property or money:** Check online for unclaimed money for the deceased from insurance companies, banks, utilities, stocks, etc. at www.missingmoney.com
- Notify credit reporting agencies:** [Experian](#), [TransUnion](#), and [Equifax](#). Use certified mail. Keep copies of everything sent. Include the following information: Name & Social Security number of deceased, last 5 years of addresses, date of birth & date of death. Request a copy of their credit report. Ask the report to be flagged with the following: "Deceased. Do not issue credit." Provide contact information for the next surviving relative or executor, and request notification, should a new credit account be filed.
Once the report is received, check: Are there any accounts to be closed or amounts still owed?
- Cancel services and subscriptions no longer needed:** These include cellphone(s), iTunes, Netflix, cable, and internet accounts.
- Cancel driver's license:** This removes the deceased's name from the records of the Department of Motor Vehicles and prevents identity theft. Contact the local DMV for specific instructions, but you'll need a copy of the death certificate.
- Delete or memorialize social media accounts:** You can delete Facebook or Instagram accounts, but some survivors choose to turn them into a memorial for their loved ones instead. A memorialized Facebook profile stays up with the word "Remembering" in front of the deceased's name. Friends will be able to post on the timeline. Whether you choose to delete or memorialize, you'll need to contact the company with copies of your ID as well as the death certificate.

- ❑ **Close email accounts:** To prevent identity theft and fraud, it's a good idea to shut down the deceased's email account(s). If the person set up a funeral plan or a will, they may have included log-in information so you can do this yourself. If not, you'll need copies of the death certificate to cancel an email account. The specifics vary by company, but most require a death certificate and verification that you are kin or the executor.

ADDITIONAL NOTES

TO BE CLEAR

This *Loss of Loved One - Financial Guidance Checklist* and all associated materials are intended to inspire and assist you with faithful stewardship information and instruction. This booklet is not an attempt to render legal, accounting, or other professional services. Your personal financial situation is unique and fact-dependent. Before making any decisions or implementing any financial strategy, you should consider obtaining information and advice from wise professionals who are fully aware of your circumstances.

