



## **May we help you?**

The Army Widows' Association (AWA) produced this e-booklet in response to requests from many of our members; we hope it will be a useful source of reference for you. You may have heard all this before, but with so much happening it may have "gone in one ear and out of the other".

Finding yourself as a widow is a devastating experience and life can seem very unfair. Overwhelmed with grief and confronted with paperwork and problems to sort out – perhaps you feel you can't cope, but you will. Take your time. Be kind to yourself and don't be rushed into making major decisions.

Paperwork can seem daunting and endless and it is easy to lose track of what you have done or said, so, how about keeping all the

correspondence you receive and file everything – at least for now. It is not difficult – just daunting. Some of the paperwork may be important in the future, so for now, keep it. Remember, whenever you speak to someone, make a note of their name and telephone number.

The Army places great emphasis on the care of widows. Your Visiting Officer will be able to ensure that everything possible is done to help you. They have many sources to call upon.

Please take care of yourself and remember there are people in the AWA who understand and want to help, so don't be afraid to ask. Visit our website or send us an email, we are here to help.

[www.armywidows.org.uk](http://www.armywidows.org.uk)

[info@armywidows.org.uk](mailto:info@armywidows.org.uk)

## **Grieving**

It is perfectly normal to feel intense emotion, such as, sadness, anger, guilt, anxiety, loneliness, helplessness, shock, yearning, relief or numbness. Additionally, disbelieving is normal, as is confusion, preoccupation, a sense of presence and hallucinations. Everyone is different and handles things in their own way. If you want to sleep in his pyjamas for 6 months – fine. If you want to burn them – fine. You must do what is right for you.

The list below might be helpful:

- Don't make any major decisions while you are still grieving. Give yourself lots of time to think about changes you may wish to make. Discuss these plans with others if you like.
- Don't neglect yourself. Try to eat well and get plenty of rest. Have treats and don't feel guilty about buying yourself a small present now and then.

- Don't enter into any financial or legal arrangements unless you fully understand them.
- Give yourself plenty of time to grieve. There is no fixed time that it takes to come to terms with bereavement. Don't let others rush you into anything before you are ready, but remember that sometimes you may not know if you are ready for something unless you try.
- Don't turn to drugs, smoking or alcohol to stop you feeling the pain of grief.
- Do express your feelings as much as possible by talking through what has happened with someone you trust.
- Do begin to make some longer term plans for the future so that you will always have something to look forward to but remember: don't rush into any big life changes.
- Do contact your doctor if you feel unwell or would like the doctor to refer you to someone to talk to.
- Do keep in touch with family and friends – remember that most people feel honoured to be asked to help. However, some people feel awkward and embarrassed about offering their help, so it may be left up to you to ask for it, even though at times this may be difficult.
- You may sometimes feel that the death of your husband has catapulted you into a bureaucratic nightmare. We can empathise with this and assure you that the paperwork does get easier, and by keeping everything you receive in these early days you will always be able to refer back if you need.

## **Wordon's Four Tasks of Mourning**

The following notes have been taken from work by William Wordon. You might find it helpful in understanding why you feel the way you do.

J William Wordon states that mourning, the adaptation to loss, may be seen as involving the 4 basic tasks outlined below. It is essential that the grieving person accomplish these tasks before mourning can be completed; uncompleted tasks impair development.

### **Task 1. Accept the reality of the loss**

It is necessary for the bereaved to accept the reality that the person is dead. Failure to understand that the person will not come back hinders the grieving process; the keeping of possessions and exploring spiritualism are signs of this. Thus saying "goodbye", for instance, at the funeral, or seeing the body, are all important to the bereaved, helping them accept. However, accepting the death is much harder if there is no physical evidence, in cases where the deceased is too badly damaged or unable to be recovered.

### **Task 2. Work through the grief and pain**

The bereaved must be allowed to experience the pain and the loss and to demonstrate feelings that will often include sadness, anger, guilt, anxiety, loneliness, fatigue, helplessness, shock, yearning, relief or numbness.

Additionally, disbelief, confusion, preoccupation, a sense of presence, hallucinations, are all "normal" and the bereaved should be assured as such. Individuals may try to protect themselves from facing the pain and so may keep extremely busy, travel a great deal, seeming to try to "run away" from the situation. A consequence of failing to work through this task may be to suffer depression later.

### **Task 3. Adjust to an environment in which the deceased is missing**

When someone dies, the shape of the bereaved's life will have changed; if a partner has died, they will be "incomplete". If a child

has died there will be a new shape to the family. These changes have to be adjusted to, new routines established, new tasks learnt which the dead person used to do; the survivor usually is not aware of all the roles played by the deceased for some time after the loss occurs. For women especially, who may define their identity through relationships and caring for others, bereavement means not only the loss of a significant other, but also the sense of a loss of self. Failure to fulfil the additional roles may lead to low self-esteem.

#### **Task 4. Relocate the deceased emotionally and rebuild life**

Gradually the bereaved will start to look forward and outward. The bereaved may need to know that it is all right to accept and rebuild. This does not mean that they have "got over" the loss, but rather that they are learning to live more comfortably with it. For many, this task is the most difficult; some people's lives stop at this point in their grieving.

Individuals will pass through these tasks in different orders; they may move backwards and forwards between them in a random order, or they could be working through 2 at the same time. Grieving in different ways and at different times may cause difficulties in a family who are all grieving, when one member may be ready to reinvest emotional energies in another.

One benchmark of completed grief reaction is when a person is able to think of the deceased without pain. Mourning is also finished when a person can reinvest his or her emotions back into life and in the living. In terms of timescales for a close relationship 2 years is not too long. Sigmund Freud said:

"We find a place for what we lose. Although we know that after such a loss the acute stage of mourning will subside, we also know that we shall remain inconsolable and will never find a substitute.

No matter what may fill the gap, even if it is filled completely, it nevertheless remains something else.”

## **Grief in Children**

Coping with children in these circumstances is very challenging. You know the children you live with better than anyone else knows them. Your own instinct is likely to tell you what is best for them. Try not to let the death take over all of the home life. Ensure that the school has been informed and that the teacher/teachers are aware of the child’s changed circumstances. Take an interest in the things that go on at school. Make sure that you and the children have enough leisure time together when you are not focusing on the illness or death. Let them know that it is OK to joke and have fun. Laughing can relieve tension.

Let them know that they are not to blame for anything that has happened and assure them that they will be looked after.

Expect some disruptive behaviour like anxiety, regression, or sulkiness. Strong emotions are hard for young people to handle.

Young children can only grieve in short bursts. The fact that they appear to have “forgotten” is quite natural and is part of their coping mechanism. They do “feel” as you do.

As they mature they will probably re-grieve in a way appropriate to that stage of their development and understanding.

Although children need a lot of love and care, they have an enormous amount to give back. Let them have the chance to do that.

If you think your child needs help in coping with the bereavement discuss this with your GP and your child's teacher.

There is more than one way to support your children. Just choose the things you feel most comfortable with and try to accept that you will get some things wrong. You are not super-human, so be gentle on yourself.

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