

# The Surviving Parent

As a widow or widower, the surviving parent/spouse will most likely go through a prolonged and intense period of grief. Suddenly, everything has changed; he or she will have to learn how to live alone, to take care of the house and financial responsibilities alone. On the other hand, if he or she was the primary caregiver for the dying parent, there might also be a sense of relief. The best thing that you can do for your surviving parent is to offer your support; you'll also be shaping a new relationship with this surviving parent.

## HERE ARE SOME TIPS FOR HELPING A WIDOWED PARENT:

### Offer Support

Offer as much psychological, emotional and physical support for your parent as needed. Stay in close contact, and discuss your grief together. You'll both be experiencing grief, but it may manifest itself in very different ways. Allow your parent to express his or her grief in the way that seems most natural.

### Social Interaction

Although going out with friends or family members may be the last thing your parent wants to do, it may also be one of the best things he or she can do. Social interaction—particularly after the initial, most painful period of grieving—can help the healing process.

### Good Health Habits

A widow or widower might become so intensely depressed that he or she avoids regular health care and good health habits. He or she may avoid going to the doctor, following a doctor's care plan, taking medications or eating properly. If you see signs that your parent is not taking good care of him or herself, initiate a discussion about it. Encourage your parent to see a doctor and to take good care of him or herself. If eating is a problem, suggest that you can help with meals. And if the depression continues, you may want to suggest anti-depressant medication, therapy or a support group for your parent.

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### Space

You might feel the impulse to protect your parent, or to do everything for him or her now that the spouse is gone. Although you want to express your love and support, it's also important to give your parent space to heal and to recreate their life alone.

### Avoid Major Decisions

In the confusion and disorientation of grief, many people make big decisions that they later regret. Encourage your parent to avoid making decisions about living arrangements, a job or finances until after the period of grief is over.

### Interests, Hobbies and Activities

Help your parent to get back into interests, hobbies or activities that he or she enjoyed before the spouse's death; these can help your parent to regain a sense of self and can speed up the healing and recovery process.

### Remembering Important Days

Especially in the first year after someone dies, important dates can be difficult—the wedding anniversary, the spouse's birthday, the anniversary of the spouse's death. Mark these on your calendar and make a special effort to be in touch with your parent on these days. Don't be afraid and ignore these dates. Over time, an elder will likely appreciate remembering instead of pretending the person never existed.

