

SECONDARY LOSSES

The death of someone important in your life and the big changes to routine that follow may lead to secondary losses. These are changes in other parts of your life that are often unexpected. Some common secondary losses are listed below.

- **Changing relationships.** You may notice changes in how you connect with your partner, children, family, friends, coworkers, or other people you know. Some relationships may grow stronger through shared grief. Others can become strained by misunderstandings, mismatched grieving styles, or emotional distance.
- **Loss of identity or roles.** You may feel as if you've lost your identity as a partner, parent, child, sibling, or friend. Know that you will always be a wife, a father, a sister, a grandchild, or whatever you were to the person who died. These special bonds can never be broken.
- **Loss of financial stability or a sense of security.** A death can result in loss of income or financial burdens—sometimes even loss of a home or living situation—making the world feel unpredictable and less safe.
- **Loss of future plans and traditions.** Dreams you shared with the person may no longer be possible. Holidays and family events may feel different or empty. It's normal to grieve the loss of hopes, plans, and traditions.
- **Major decisions.** After a loss, you may feel the urge to make a big change, like moving or quitting your job. If it's something you've long considered, this may be the push you need. But if the feeling is new, it may be more about grief than an actual need to make this change.

Hold off on making big changes, if possible. Give yourself more time to understand what's driving those decisions. It's also okay to set these thoughts aside for now and focus on adjusting to your new normal.

As you work through these secondary losses, give yourself—and others around you—grace. Lean into open, honest communication with friends and family, and turn to counseling and grief support when you need it. Reach out to trusted people in your support network for financial or legal advice.

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LEANING INTO SELF-CARE

A few weeks after your loss, you may have more time to focus on self-care.

Remember, self-care isn't selfish—it's essential. Taking care of yourself can ease emotional and physical symptoms and support healing.

- **Eat well, hydrate, and stay active.** Choose easy, low-prep meals or have small, healthy snacks throughout the day. Drink enough water so your urine is almost clear. Limit highly processed, alcoholic, and caffeinated drinks. If you don't have a workout routine, try short walks, stretches, or gentle yoga.
- **Rest or nap when you can,** especially if you have trouble sleeping at night. Try a relaxing bedtime routine, like a bath, warm milk, or herbal tea, and limit screen time before bed.
- **Maintain personal hygiene.** Brush your teeth and hair, bathe, and change into clean clothes daily to help you feel a little more like yourself and maintain a sense of normalcy after loss.
- **Practice mindfulness and gratitude.** Being fully present in the moment and being aware of your thoughts, feelings, and surroundings can help ease grief. Some exercises that can help are below.
 - **Box breathing:** Inhale deeply through your nose for 4 seconds, letting your belly rise. Hold your breath for 4 seconds. Exhale slowly through your mouth for 4 seconds. Focus on how each breath feels. Repeat 3–5 times.
 - **Meditation:** Sit or lie down in a quiet space. Start with a few deep, cleansing breaths, then breathe normally. Close your eyes, focus on your breath, and let thoughts come and go. Start with 2–5 minutes per day and work your way up. Download an app to help with guided meditation.
 - **Practicing gratitude:** Every day, write down (or think of) 1–3 things, big or small, you are grateful for.
- **Do calming activities** like reading, crafting, listening to music, having quiet time, cuddling pets, or connecting with loved ones.

How do you like to practice self-care? What brings you peace, calm, or happiness? Little by little, try to fit these activities back into your routine.

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GRIEVING CHILDREN & TEENS

Some adults believe children aren't grieving because they can quickly shift from sadness to play. But children's grief can last for years and resurface at big milestones in their lives. Here are some ways to support them.

- **Stick to a routine.** Loss can deeply affect children if it disrupts daily life. As you build new routines, let kids know that they are safe, cared for, and loved.
- **Speak to children honestly about death.** Avoid euphemisms (e.g., “*he went to sleep*”) that may cause fear or confusion. Invite children to ask questions. It's okay to say “*I don't know*” if you don't have the answers.
- **Let kids be involved in memorials** or other rituals in simple, low-pressure ways. They could draw pictures, tell stories, or choose photos. If they don't want to participate, that's okay, too.
- **Give kids extra support during key moments**, such as:
 - Holidays, birthdays, and coming-of-age milestones
 - Graduations or award ceremonies
 - Firsts (first lost tooth, first day of school, first date, etc.)
 - Events involving adult participation (like daddy-daughter dances, breakfast with grandparents, mother's day parties, etc.)
- **Validate their grief** by helping them express their feelings. They could:
 - Create a photo album or scrapbook that they can keep.
 - Save an empty chair at important meals or events.
 - Share stories about their loved one.
 - Do art, crafts, or journaling.
- **Adjust your approach for grieving teens.** Many teens grieve more like adults and may prefer to grieve privately. Respect their wishes, but check in often and create a safe space for them to express their feelings. Watch for warning signs like major mood shifts, falling grades, or risky behavior.

Grief can affect your parenting, too. You may have less energy and patience in the months after loss. It's normal to feel overwhelmed or unsure of how to support your child while grieving yourself. **Be kind to yourself, get support when you need it, and remember: showing up with love and honesty matters more than being a perfect parent.**

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