



I've Died. Now What?





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First Things First

Call 911 immediately in case of emergency.

Keep this information nearby should an unexpected and/or incapacitating illness arise:

- ▶ Primary care physician contact info.
- ▶ Medication list
- ▶ Health insurance information
- ▶ Medical allergies
- ▶ Blood type
- ▶ Advance directive (DNR, living will, health proxy)
- ▶ Power of attorney
- ▶ Dementia protocol



First
Things
First



First steps to take in the aftermath of a death:

► **Enlist the help of a funeral director**

He or she can walk you through initial decisions with respect to properly attending to the body, contacting loved ones, creating an obituary, planning a memorial service, and obtaining a death certificate.

► **Reach out to the decedent's financial planner/advisor**

These professionals often have necessary information at their disposal related to current accounts, taxes, wills, insurance, and beneficiaries.

► **Contact the Social Security Administration (if applicable)**

The SSA can help close relatives set up survivor benefits.

► **Contact the decedent's attorney (if applicable)**

Reach out to the attorney who created any wills/trusts for asset distribution purposes.





What is Where?

Create a reference list detailing the location of the following items and share this information with a trusted person:

- ▶ Living will
- ▶ Do-not-resuscitate (DNR) order
- ▶ Keys
- ▶ Safe deposit box (practice access)
- ▶ Copy of will and/or trust
- ▶ Buried gold or bitcoin wallets
- ▶ Funeral desires (e.g., burial or cremation)
- ▶ Legacy information
- ▶ Account lists
- ▶ Passwords

Use a password manager and provide a trusted contact with the password, or establish an “emergency contact” to give the same person appointed access.





Illness or Incapacitation: Vital Info.

Parties to Contact

- ▶ Emergency contact
- ▶ Health care representative
- ▶ Primary care physician
- ▶ Preferred hospital
- ▶ Health insurance carrier
- ▶ Pharmacy

List of Current Medications

- ▶ Name, dosage, frequency

Automatically Renewing Medications

- ▶ Name(s) of prescribing physician(s)
- ▶ Name(s) of medication(s)
- ▶ Name of pharmacy

Health Information

- ▶ Blood type
- ▶ Medical allergies
- ▶ Chronic illnesses

Faith Information

- ▶ Clergy name/contact information
- ▶ Last rites
- ▶ Final wishes



Advance Directives (Do not keep in safe-deposit box)

- ▶ Living will
- ▶ Health care proxy
- ▶ Do-not-resuscitate (DNR) order

Power of Attorney

- ▶ Name of person appointed
- ▶ POA documentation
- ▶ Name of attorney/law firm that created the POA





End-of-Life Planning

Contact Funeral Director

Pre-Paid Funeral Arrangements: Yes ☐ No ☐

Funeral Home: _____ Phone: _____

- ▶ Contact friends and family?
- ▶ Social media announcement?
- ▶ Email contact list?

Important Documents

Will: Yes ☐ No ☐

Living Will: Yes ☐ No ☐

Will Location: _____

Executor: _____

Address: _____ Phone: _____

Email: _____

Will

- ▶ Keep the original safe
- ▶ Ensure a copy is accessible
- ▶ Maintain copies of previous versions
- ▶ Jot down the name of the attorney/law firm that helped create the will



Trust

- ▶ Includes a declaration of trust or trust agreement(s)
- ▶ Jot down the name of the attorney/law firm that helped create the trust
- ▶ List accounts/property associated with the trust

Safe Deposit Box

- ▶ Jot down where the safe deposit box is located
- ▶ Keep safe deposit box keys in a safe location, also noting their location

Professional Assistance (Information)

- ▶ Attorneys
- ▶ Financial planners
- ▶ Accountants/tax preparers
- ▶ Insurance agents
- ▶ Brokers

Proof-of-Identity and Relationship Documents (Locations)

- ▶ Birth certificate
- ▶ Social Security card
- ▶ Passport
- ▶ Marriage certificate
- ▶ Divorce certificate
- ▶ Prenuptial agreement
- ▶ Divorce settlement
- ▶ Armed forces discharge papers
- ▶ Death certificate



Armed Forces

Branch of Service: _____ Service Serial # _____

Date Entered: _____ Place of Entry _____

Date Discharged: _____ Place of Discharge _____ Honorable? _____

Location of Military Discharge Papers (DD214): _____

Highest Grade, Rank or Rating Received: _____

Receiving Military Pension? _____

Wars/Conflicts Served: _____





Burial and Funeral Planning

Primary Party Responsible for Arrangements

Name: _____ Relationship: _____

Phone: _____ Address: _____

Obituary Information

Obituary drafted? Yes ☐ No ☐

Draft location _____

Obituary photo? Yes ☐ No ☐

Publish obituary? Yes ☐ No ☐

Media outlet(s) for publishing obituary: _____

Online memorial page? Yes ☐ No ☐

Online memorial page location(s): _____

Life Celebration Plan

Disposition Type: Niche ☐ Burial ☐ Scattering ☐

Visitation: Yes ☐ No ☐ Public ☐

Type of Funeral Service (Select All That Apply)

- ▶ Chapel/church service
- ▶ Graveside service
- ▶ Memorial service
- ▶ Funeral home visitation
- ▶ Burial
- ▶ Cremation scattering



Funeral/Memorial Service

Visitation Location: _____ Service Location: _____

Casket Selection: Open ☐ Closed ☐

Clothing: _____ Glasses? _____

Cremation urn selection? _____ Urn present for memorial service? Yes ☐ No ☐

Ceremony Preference(s): _____

Music Preference(s): _____

Eulogist(s): _____

Participating fraternal, military, or service organization(s)? _____

Cemetery Plot Information

Cemetery: _____ Location: _____

Vault/Burial Container: _____

Marker/Memorialization: _____





Meaningful Life Moments/Legacy

Something I've enjoyed most in life is:

I have fond memories of:

My favorite places to visit include:

One of the funniest things that ever happened to me was:

My proudest family moments are:

My proudest career accomplishments are:

My proudest civic accomplishments/experiences are:

Special achievements/awards/positions/recognition include:

Life was tough at times, but:

My two-sentence view of life (my ethos) is:



Account Checklists

Basic Information to List

- ① Company/organization
- ② Account number
- ③ Contact information/passwords

Insurance

Beneficiaries: _____

Insurance Policies

- ▶ Life insurance
- ▶ Health insurance
- ▶ Disability insurance
- ▶ Long-Term Care
- ▶ Car insurance
- ▶ Home insurance
- ▶ Other insurance policies (fire, theft, flood, earthquake, etc.)
- ▶ Funeral trust account



FINANCIAL

Bank Accounts

- ▶ Checking accounts (authorized signers?)
- ▶ Savings accounts
- ▶ Money market accounts
- ▶ Certificates of deposit (CDs)
- ▶ Debit cards

Trusts

- ▶ Declaration of trust or trust agreements
- ▶ Name of attorney/law firm that helped create the trust
- ▶ Bank accounts associated with the trust

Social Security

- ▶ Disability payments
- ▶ Retirement benefits
- ▶ Spousal benefits

Retirement Investments

- ▶ 401(k) or 403(b) plans
- ▶ IRAs
- ▶ Roth IRAs
- ▶ SEP (Simplified Employee Pension)
- ▶ SARSEP (Salary Reduction Simplified Employee Pension)
- ▶ Defined benefit pension
- ▶ Past employer pension
- ▶ Government pension
- ▶ Military pension



Credit Cards

- ▶ Card type(s)/number(s)
- ▶ Expiration date(s)
- ▶ Recent account statements

Taxes

- ▶ Most recent W-2 or tax return
- ▶ Gift tax returns
- ▶ Estimated taxes due?

Investment Portfolios

- ▶ Stocks
- ▶ Bonds
- ▶ Mutual funds





PROPERTIES

Mortgage and Loans

- ▶ Copy of mortgage or loan agreement(s)
- ▶ Auto loan company
- ▶ Other loans (boat, home equity, personal, etc.)

Titles and Deeds

- ▶ Real estate
- ▶ Motor vehicles
- ▶ Boats
- ▶ Land

Household/Personal Accounts

*Remember two-factor authentication/secret questions for online accounts

Utilities and Services (Provider and Account Numbers)

- ▶ Electric
- ▶ Gas
- ▶ Water
- ▶ Sewer
- ▶ Telephone
- ▶ Cellular phone
- ▶ Internet
- ▶ Cable
- ▶ Newspapers
- ▶ Lawn service
- ▶ Snow removal
- ▶ HOA



Automatically Renewing Subscriptions

- ▶ Magazines
- ▶ Newspapers
- ▶ Streaming services (e.g., Netflix, Amazon Prime, Hulu)
- ▶ Fitness apps
- ▶ E-readers (e.g., Kindle)
- ▶ Warehouse club memberships (e.g., Costco, Sam's Club)
- ▶ Miscellaneous (e.g., car wash facilities)

Digital Accounts and Wallets

- | | | |
|-------------------|-----------|-----------|
| ▶ Amazon | username: | password: |
| ▶ eBay | username: | password: |
| ▶ PayPal | username: | password: |
| ▶ Venmo | username: | password: |
| ▶ Zelle | username: | password: |
| ▶ Apple Pay | username: | password: |
| ▶ Google Pay | username: | password: |
| ▶ Treasury Direct | username: | password: |

Email and Cloud

- | | | |
|-------------|-----------|-----------|
| ▶ Gmail | username: | password: |
| ▶ AOL | username: | password: |
| ▶ Yahoo | username: | password: |
| ▶ Hotmail | username: | password: |
| ▶ Apple ID | username: | password: |
| ▶ Dropbox | username: | password: |
| ▶ One Drive | username: | password: |
| ▶ Google | username: | password: |



Social Media

| | | |
|-------------|-----------|-----------|
| ► Facebook | username: | password: |
| ► X | username: | password: |
| ► LinkedIn | username: | password: |
| ► Snapchat | username: | password: |
| ► Instagram | username: | password: |
| ► YouTube | username: | password: |

Additional Actions to Take

- Visit <https://unclaimed.org/> to search unclaimed property records for any abandoned bank accounts or investments.
- Visit <https://www.pbgc.gov/search/unclaimed-pensions> to search for unclaimed pensions.
- Visit www.google.com/alerts to sign up to receive an email alert if your loved one's death notice is posted somewhere online.
- Cash in any E and EE savings bonds to include on the final tax return (note: many older savings bonds no longer earn interest).
- Alerts for property title documents.
- As you will need certified death certificate copies for every bank, insurance company, and investment account (as well as certified death/marriage certificates for Social Security and/or military pension survivor's benefits), use this strategy to decrease the number of official documents you must obtain: lightly color in the raised seal on the official certificate in pencil and then photocopy/scan it to submit copies in this manner (noting that if you send a self-addressed stamped envelope to the insurance company upon making a claim, they will return your certified death certificate).



If a Close Loved One Passes Away...

- ▶ **CONTACT THE FUNERAL DIRECTOR** and make an appointment to discuss funeral arrangements, requesting at least ten copies of the death certificate for distribution to the decedent's employer (if applicable), life insurance companies, financial institutions, and other legal procedures. Death Certificates may be free for veterans in some locales
- ▶ **ADVISE THE SURVIVING SPOUSE (IF APPLICABLE) TO AVOID MAKING MAJOR DECISIONS** in the year following his/her spouse's death: including buying or selling a residence, borrowing, or loaning money (including amongst family/friends), changing jobs, making large purchases, etc.
- ▶ **BE AWARE** that any salary payments will immediately cease, so spouses should plan and spend cautiously in the weeks and months that follow.
- ▶ **NOTIFY AN ATTORNEY OF THE DECEDENT'S DEATH**, making an appointment to review the will and discuss any state/federal death taxes as well as cashflow and liquidity needs.
- ▶ **WITHDRAW MONIES FROM SAFE DEPOSIT BOXES AND/OR CHECKING OR SAVINGS ACCOUNTS** immediately upon death (or perhaps prior to imminent death). In some states, these accounts are frozen as soon as the institution involved becomes aware that the owner (or joint owner) has died. Although such assets are intended to pass to a surviving spouse outside of the standard probate process, actual possession may be delayed pending a court order that may depend on proving to inheritance/estate tax officials that the estate owns other assets adequate to pay potential estate/inheritance taxes. As such delays can lead to hardship or the inability to pay imminent bills, the client may prioritize removing items from safe deposit boxes or saving accounts before an obituary is published (some banks do look out for these).
- ▶ **CONSIDER AN EMERGENCY LOAN** (e.g., a personal loan from a friend or relative, the Red Cross (especially if the decedent was a veteran), or the Salvation Army).



- ▶ **NOTIFY CLUBS**, fraternal organizations, alumni offices, and other associates of the decedent's passing.
- ▶ **LOCATE THE DECEDENT'S IMPORTANT DOCUMENTS**, ensuring the family is aware of the need to gather these.
- ▶ **NOTIFY THE SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION OF THE DEATH**, making a personal visit to the nearest office to expedite claims (the first survivor's benefit check typically arrives one to three months after the application is submitted).
- ▶ **NOTIFY VETERANS AFFAIRS TO INQUIRE ABOUT DEATH BENEFITS ELIGIBILITY** (if applicable), also inquiring about other related benefits such as educational assistance for family survivors.
- ▶ **NOTIFY LIFE OR ACCIDENT INSURERS** of the death, inquiring about the information they need to begin processing claims: asking which payment option the decedent had selected and choosing another option if preferred (a lump sum is paid in the absence of this).
- ▶ **CHECK WITH INSURERS REGARDING THE AVAILABILITY OF A CASH ADVANCE FROM LIFE BENEFITS** the survivor is entitled to, which is especially important if emergency cash is needed before insurance claims are paid.
- ▶ **IF THE SPOUSE IS ELIGIBLE FOR MEDICARE**, notify the program office and provide the required information.
- ▶ **NOTIFY MEDICAL/HOMEOWNER'S/AUTO INSURERS**
- ▶ **PROVIDE THE DECEDENT'S EMPLOYEE BENEFITS OFFICE** with the decedent's name, Social Security number, date of death, manner of death (accident or illness), and the survivor's name and address so the company can process benefits immediately.
- ▶ **NOTIFY THE STATE INHERITANCE TAX OFFICE** (if applicable), requesting the required forms. In many states, a release is necessary before company insurance benefits are paid.



- ▶ **DEVELOP A DETAILED INVENTORY OF ASSETS** with market value as of the date of death, including real estate.
- ▶ **KEEP A RECORD OF ALL ACTIVITIES** related to the estate, enlisting the help of a designated family member/friend to record dates, names, addresses, decisions made, etc.
- ▶ **RECORD ALL MONEY SPENT IN A LEDGER**, with these figures needed for tax returns and to fulfill fiduciary responsibilities.
- ▶ **PAY OUTSTANDING BILLS AND FILE TAX RETURNS**
- ▶ **CANCEL THE DECEDENT'S CREDIT CARDS** or transfer to the spouse.
- ▶ **EVALUATE LIFE INSURANCE COVERAGE AND MAKE ANY NECESSARY CHANGES** for policy beneficiaries and other contracts as well (e.g., an IRA).
- ▶ **SECURE NECESSARY OWNERSHIP REGISTRATION CHANGES**, focusing on items such as autos, stocks, bonds, investments, residences, boats, savings/checking/credit card accounts, and safe deposit boxes (noting all beneficiaries must amend their own wills).
- ▶ **CHANGE SECURITIES REGISTRATION**, knowing although necessary documents for retitling assets vary from state to state and institution to institution, four legal documents are typically required: a certified death certificate copy, notarized affidavit of domicile, completed stock power form authorizing change of registration with a signature guarantee, and (if a trust is involved) a complete copy of the trust document (sometimes required by banks and brokerage houses in particular). Call ahead to learn what exactly is needed, knowing a letter of instruction must accompany the appropriate forms.



Financial Advice For Widows/Widowers

In the wake of your spouse's death, it is important not to rush but instead take your time when facing any big decisions. You're going through a grieving process, after all, so your head is not clear at the moment. You're also probably bombarded with suggestions from family members and salespeople who may not really know your unique situation and are therefore ill-equipped to offer the best advice. If you're not up to handling finance-based decisions that are necessary at this time, however, consider enlisting the help of a financial planner to assist you. You can seek out recommendations from financial advisors, your attorney, friends, etc. One option is to gather the names of reputable professionals from the National Association of Personal Financial Advisors or Alliance of Comprehensive Planners, and carefully screen potential advisors and checking their references.





Imminent actions to take after a spouse passes away:

- ① Plan the funeral/memorial service, obtain/organize necessary documents, and apply for death benefits (while making corresponding lists reminding yourself of the same).
- ② Consult your spouse's will, powers of attorney, and any letters of instruction that may steer you in the right direction.
- ③ Keep a log of your activities, marking down the date and contact, action(s) taken, and money spent.
- ④ Request multiple copies ,at least 10, of the death certificate.
- ⑤ Meet with your attorney, inviting the executor of the will or trustee (if not you) to join as you discuss the necessary steps to settle the estate; as trusts may require you to disclaim a portion of assets, check this before collecting insurance proceeds or changing titles on assets.
- ⑥ Organize all documents (the will and any trusts, insurance policies, birth certificates, family Social Security numbers, marriage license, military discharge papers, company benefits information, and statements for all financial accounts), locating or creating an inventory of assets/debts as well as a net-worth statement.
- ⑦ Pay bills and create an emergency budget based on all income sources and a list of periodic bills, ensuring you can access funds to pay for the funeral/related expenses and enough money in a liquid account to cover six months of living expenses.
- ⑧ Withdraw all items from safe deposit boxes and take an inventory of contents immediately after your spouse dies—or even prior to his/her death (if imminent).



Death benefit application process:

- ❶ Contact your life insurance agent to collect benefits, keeping the proceeds in a cash account until you decide to take them as a lump sum or in installments (or purchase an annuity). You may be able to obtain a cash advance if you need money right away. If you have difficulty locating policy information, refer to old check book registers/financial records to seek out checks written to an insurance company. You can also head to www.acli.com (American Council of Life Insurers) or www.life-line.org (The Life and Health Insurance Foundation for Education) or call 1-888-346-8200 for help.
- ❷ If your spouse was employed at the time of his/her death, contact the company human resources department for help with any unpaid salary, vacation/sick pay, bonuses and commissions, life insurance/pension benefits, access to qualified accounts, stock options, and any other benefits due. If the death occurred due to an on-the-job accident, accidental death benefits may immediately follow (with some employers also offering financial planning and/or grief counseling for survivors).
- ❸ Contact the Social Security Administration, knowing claims are often expedited if you head to your local SSA office. Unmarried children under age 18 (or older if attending high school and/or disabled) are eligible for benefits, and you may qualify for survivor benefits if they are in your care. Keep in mind you can apply for Social Security retirement benefits as early as age 60 if you are a widow(er)—or even earlier in some cases—and there is often a small death benefit. Call 1-800-772-1213 or visit www.ssa.gov for additional information.
- ❹ If your spouse was a military veteran, contact the Department of Veterans Affairs; he or she may receive a free burial in a national cemetery, a flag for the memorial service, and/or a grave headstone. Some widow(er)s also receive money to help with burial expenses, and surviving spouses/children of active-duty or retired military are eligible for additional benefits including medical care, commissary exchange, and veterans' mortgage life insurance. Call 1-800-827-1000 or visit www.va.gov for more information on benefits and procedures.
- ❺ You may be eligible to receive death benefits via unions, professional/fraternal organizations, and travel/credit card/loan insurance; investigate these options if applicable.



Other steps to take:

- ① Make sure you have medical insurance coverage following the death of your spouse; if you (and your family, if applicable) were covered under his/her work policy, contact the HR department to learn if you can continue under the group plan via COBRA coverage (www.cobrahealth.com). **Don't delay; you must contact the employer within 30 days of death to do so.** If you move forward with COBRA, the required premium will be less than an individual policy (though you can convert to the latter from existing group coverage). If you have your own policy, notify your agent of the death to reduce premiums (the same applies to Medicare).
- ② Notify your auto and homeowner's insurance agent(s) of your spouse's death to reduce premiums.
- ③ Change the title and beneficiaries (if applicable) on investments, your residence, vehicles, and any safe deposit boxes. You may want to delay changing names on credit cards so you can continue to use them, but whenever you do decide to make this change, you'll need to provide each credit card company with a letter requesting change of ownership (attaching a copy of the death certificate).
- ④ If you have any children in college, contact the financial aid office; your child(ren) may qualify for financial assistance and/or increased financial aid.
- ⑤ In settling the estate, work with the executor to file an estate tax return and the final income tax return: updating asset/liability inventory, including market value on the date of death, and performing any necessary appraisals.
- ⑥ Update your monthly budget, review all insurance needs, and revise your own will and any letters of instruction. You'll ideally want to hold off on making any major financial decisions—such as paying off your home or altering your investments—for about a year, if possible. Discuss finances with family members, craft a new financial plan, and inform your executor (or anyone with power of attorney) about where your important documents are located.