

Financial checklist:

What to do when your spouse dies

You can never truly be prepared for the death of a spouse or partner. Don't be afraid to ask for help during this difficult time. The following checklist can help.

- Call your attorney.
Find out what the process is regarding the estate and what you need to know going forward.
- Contact the **Social Security Administration**.
Depending on the circumstances, Social Security survivor benefits could be payable to you.
- Notify your spouse's employer.
Obtain any benefits due to beneficiaries. Check their retirement or pension plans. If you or your children were covered through your spouse's medical insurance, ask about continuing that coverage. Notify your employer, too, since death of a spouse may be a "life event" that may trigger benefit decisions.
- Contact your spouse's former employers.
Ask if there are life insurance policies, a pension, an old 401(k) or other benefits.
- Contact the **Veteran's Administration**.
If your spouse served in the military, learn what benefits might be due to you.
- Notify all insurance companies.
Include both life and health, so they can send you claim forms and instructions. It can take weeks to receive funds, so try to get started as soon as possible.
- Change property titles.
Remove your spouse's name and update insurance policies.
- Change titles on all jointly-held bank, investment, and credit accounts.
Close accounts that were in your spouse's name only.
- Send a letter to all three major credit bureaus.
Include **Equifax**, **Experian**, and **TransUnion** to get a copy of your spouse's credit reports so you're aware of all debts. Ask to have a notification in the credit report that says "Deceased - do not issue" so new credit is not taken out in his or her name.
- Locate the will.
Generally, it's filed with an estate planning attorney or family attorney, or located in a lockbox or safe deposit box. Contact the attorney for a reading and to settle the estate.
- Notify your accountant/tax preparer.
Taxes for your spouse should be filed for the year of death and any taxes paid. Since there could be complicated issues to deal with, it may be best to have a tax professional help.
- Call the financial aid office if you have a child in college.
You may qualify for more assistance.
- Work with a financial advisor.
He or she can help update your financial plan based on benefits you've received. Create a new budget for your new income and expenses.