

Helping a Loved One with Alzheimer's Deal with the Loss of Their Partner



Helping a loved one cope with the loss of their spouse is difficult in any situation, but if the [surviving spouse](#) has Alzheimer's, it can present a unique challenge - especially if that spouse was their primary caregiver. Helping a loved one deal with this loss requires patience, understanding, and a significant understanding of their condition.

Know how to break the news

Like anyone else, Alzheimer's patients deserve to be told when their spouse has died. Lying to them around the time of death is doing them no favors. The conversation must be had, even if you think they will become agitated and/or forget about it soon. [One good tip](#) is to limit the handling of the news to one person, as to not confuse them. Choose one family member to break the news and answer any questions they may have. Try to pick a time and place where your loved one is comfortable, unagitated, and as lucid as possible.

When conveying the news, don't use euphemisms and don't try to sugar coat it. Use phrases like *your husband has died*, or use their name and say *Alice died last night*. Avoid using phrases like *Tom is no longer with us* or *Jean passed away*. These will only confuse your loved one with Alzheimer's.

Have a strategy for when they forget

It's highly likely that your loved one with Alzheimer's will forget that their spouse is dead. It may happen over and over again. If they ask you a point blank question about it, you should answer honestly. If they are extremely agitated or having a particularly non-lucid day, it's ok to try switching the subject to avoid having to tell them that their spouse is dead. [Suggest an activity](#), like going on a walk or playing a card game. Distractions help.

You never want to remind your loved one that their spouse is dead if you can avoid it. As notable Alzheimer's author Marie Marley [says](#), even "if they do believe you they'll probably be very upset by the news. What's more, they're likely to soon forget what you said and go back to believing their loved one is still alive."

Help pick up the slack

If the primary caregiver dies, you can help by picking up the caregiving slack. Take over their duties until you can figure out exactly how you're going to replace the deceased caregiver. The best thing you can do for your loved one is to be there for them to help them with their daily tasks and to be a shoulder to lean on during times of confusion. The absolute worst thing for an Alzheimer's patient is to be alone following the death of their spouse. If you have siblings, cousins, children, or other family members, make a care schedule so that your loved one will always have support.

Part of caring for your loved one in the immediate aftermath will involve going through their deceased [spouse's belongings](#). Take the lead on deciding what to keep, what to donate/throw away, and what to distribute to surviving family members. One good strategy is to save as many items with extreme sentimental value as possible, so they can be easily accessible should your loved one become agitated and demand to see them. You can't remove all reminders of their deceased spouse from the house, so you should instead use them to your advantage.

Many with Alzheimer's can remember things from 30 years ago but struggle with memories from 30 minutes ago. Oftentimes reliving the past through mementos and photos can be reassuring. Of course, sometimes it can have the opposite effect. Judge your loved one's state of mind and learn how to know when reminiscing will help and when it will hurt.

[Photo Credit: Unsplash](#)