

Your Financial Guide After Loss



A comprehensive guide exclusively for recent widows that outlines practical steps, resources, and a clear path forward.



Derrick J Diksa, ChFC®, CLTC®
FINANCIAL PLANNER

302-265-2236
DERRICK@BDFSMAIL.COM

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19409 Plantation Rd. Building 2 Unit 1

Rehoboth Beach, DE 19971

www.blackdiamondfs.com

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A note from the Author.

Losing a spouse is one of life's most painful and disorienting experiences. In the first year after such a loss, the days can feel overwhelming, filled with unfamiliar decisions, countless details, and emotions that seem to shift by the hour. **It is natural to feel unprepared, uncertain, and even paralyzed at times. Please know, you are not alone in this, and there are steady, practical steps you can take to regain a sense of stability and direction.**

As a Financial Planner, I have walked alongside many widows during this most difficult season of life. My work is not only about numbers or paperwork yet instead, it is about easing burdens when everything feels heavy and helping bring order when life has been turned upside down. I chose to dedicate my practice to this work because I have seen the difference it makes when someone has both compassionate guidance and clear expertise at their side. My role is to stand with you, to help you navigate both the financial and practical matters that demand attention, while respecting the deeply personal nature of your journey.

This booklet was created to give you a clear, step-by-step path through the first year after loss. Inside, you will find practical guidance on what needs to be done right away, what can wait, and how to prioritize without becoming overwhelmed.

My hope is that these pages serve as both a roadmap and a source of reassurance so that you can take one thing at a time, at your own pace, and with the confidence that you are moving forward in a thoughtful and supported way.

Sincerely,



Derrick J Diksa, CLTC®
FINANCIAL PLANNER

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DERRICK@BDFSMAIL.COM

Introduction

A black and white photograph of a white dove in flight, its wings spread, flying towards the right. To the right of the dove is a simple wooden cross. The background is a soft, out-of-focus landscape with some foliage on the left and a hill on the right.

Your path forward: financial clarity in the days, weeks, and months ahead.

Losing a spouse or partner is one of life's most difficult experiences. While you navigate grief, you may also find yourself facing urgent financial matters.

This guide is designed to help you take one step at a time. Each section begins with a short checklist of immediate tasks, followed by details and context to guide you through.

You don't have to do everything at once. Use this as both a practical roadmap and a supportive companion.



First Week

The first few days are about stability. Request multiple copies of the death certificate — banks, insurers, and government agencies will all require one. Gather key legal and financial documents so you can respond to requests when needed.

Notify the Social Security Administration and insurance providers as soon as possible to prevent issues with benefits or coverage. If your spouse was employed, contact HR for immediate guidance on pay or benefits.

It's important to cover essential bills to avoid disruptions in your home life. Beyond that, **allow yourself to pause**. Avoid making major financial decisions in this stage — write them down on a “Decide Later List” and revisit them in 90 days or later.

CHECKLIST

The First Week:

- ☐ Request 10–20 certified copies of the death certificate
- ☐ Locate important documents: will, trust, marriage certificate, ID, insurance policies, recent tax return
- ☐ Notify Social Security Administration, spouse's employer, and insurance providers
- ☐ Ensure essential bills (mortgage/rent, utilities, insurance) are paid
- ☐ Ask family/friends for help with funeral arrangements and daily tasks
- ☐ Create a “Decide Later List” for major financial choices

Within the First Month

The first month is about securing benefits and closing open loops. File for survivor benefits with Social Security and, if applicable, Veterans Affairs. Your spouse's employer may provide access to retirement funds, pensions, or life insurance — coordinate directly with HR.

Protect your accounts. Update passwords, and if you feel vulnerable to identity theft, request a fraud alert or credit freeze with the major credit bureaus.

Keep everything organized with a benefits log — a simple notebook or spreadsheet where you track who you spoke with, when, and what documents were provided.

CHECKLIST

Within the First Month:

- ☐ File for Social Security survivor (and child) benefits
- ☐ Contact the Department of Veterans Affairs (if applicable)
- ☐ Work with employer HR for unpaid salary, retirement plans, pensions, or life insurance
- ☐ Notify banks and credit unions; update accounts as needed
- ☐ Secure accounts with updated passwords; consider fraud alerts or a credit freeze
- ☐ Keep a **benefits log** of calls, documents, and next steps



Within 90 Days

With immediate needs settled, you can now begin reestablishing order. Build a new budget that reflects your changed income and expenses. Reduce strain by canceling unnecessary subscriptions or memberships.

Work with a tax professional to file your spouse's final tax return. If the estate requires probate, start that process with legal counsel and carefully separate estate funds from personal accounts.

Order a credit report for your spouse to identify debts and prevent fraud. Redirect any extra funds toward building an emergency cushion of 3–6 months' expenses.

Red Flags:

Don't rush into new investments, avoid high-pressure sales tactics, and delay large financial moves until you have clarity.

CHECKLIST

Within 90 Days:

- ☐ Create a new budget reflecting income and expense changes
- ☐ Review bills; cancel unused memberships or subscriptions
- ☐ File spouse's final tax return (consider professional help)
- ☐ Start the estate process: probate, executor duties, debt settlement
- ☐ Obtain spouse's credit report to check debts and prevent identity theft
- ☐ Begin building a 3–6 month emergency fund

Months 3–12

In the months ahead, your focus shifts toward long-term stability. Confirm what your ongoing income sources will be and adjust accordingly. Review your health coverage options — through COBRA, the marketplace, or Medicare — to ensure you remain protected.

Update your estate documents and beneficiary designations to reflect your current situation. Simplify accounts where possible for easier management.

Before making any big changes like moving or downsizing, carefully evaluate costs and needs. Review your insurance policies to make sure coverage is appropriate.

Finally, establish an **annual financial review** routine with a trusted advisor — to stay proactive in managing your financial future.

CHECKLIST

Months 3–12:

- ☐ Clarify income sources (work, pension, annuities, survivor benefits)
- ☐ Review ongoing health coverage options
- ☐ Update or create estate documents (will, powers of attorney, healthcare directives)
- ☐ Update beneficiaries and account titling; simplify accounts
- ☐ Reassess housing needs and costs before making big moves
- ☐ Review insurance coverage (life, auto, property, umbrella)
- ☐ Set up an annual financial review routine

Emotional & Practical Supports

Finances matter, but so does protecting your personal well-being.
Use the TEAM framework:

Time

Give yourself permission to pause and heal.

Energy

Conserve energy by delegating tasks.

Attention

Focus only on what must be handled right away.

Money

Protect your resources by pacing decisions.

Consider scheduling a small weekly money task — even 30 minutes can keep you moving forward. Connect with grief support groups or a counselor to protect your emotional health as you adjust.

Resources



Social Security Administration: 800-772-1213



Veterans Affairs: 800-MYVA411



IRS: 800-829-1040



Credit Bureaus: Equifax, Experian, TransUnion



Legal Aid: LawHelp.org, Legal Services Corporation



Housing Counseling: HUD-approved agencies



Eldercare Locator: 800-677-1116



Local grief counseling and bereavement support groups

About Black Diamond Financial Solutions



At Black Diamond, we understand that loss brings both emotional and financial challenges. You don't have to navigate this journey alone. Our team is here to help you take steady steps forward — protecting your financial well-being while honoring your loved one's memory.

Office :

19409 Plantation Rd, Building 2 Unit 1,
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Phone Number :

(302) 265-2236

Website:

www.blackdiamondfs.com



Derrick J. Diksa, CLTC®
FINANCIAL ADVISOR

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DERRICK@BDFSMail.COM



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