

What to Do When a Spouse Dies

PRACTICAL MATTERS



BY ALAN DAVIDSON

In addition to advance preparations for death, it's also important to plan carefully after a death occurs. Some of that planning necessarily involves immediate legal matters, such as probating wills and paying taxes. But longer term, the most important planning involves survivors' lives.

When one's spouse dies, a person sometimes feels moving to a new home—one that doesn't hold memories of her deceased spouse—would be helpful. A new home may provide a new start or fewer painful memories, but as long as one is physically and financially able to remain in his long-time home, it's usually best to postpone the decision. Try to continue living in the home for at least a year before making the major decision to move.

Other decisions about major life changes should also happen only after careful consideration. While widows and widowers usually think they should be receptive to adult children's suggestions concerning their future, they should reserve the right to make their own decisions, following what will make them happy (rather than trying to please the children).

Some individuals and companies target sales of products or services to widows and widowers, who may be unaccustomed to dealing with money or may be grieving too much to think clearly about the decision. Especially after the loss of a loved one, everyone should be wary of people trying to sell something, especially investments. Generally, the more assets one inherits, the more such people they're likely to attract. Before agreeing to buy or sell any investments, make sure you know who you're dealing with and that they have only your best interests at heart. 🍷

Alan Davidson was a bank trust officer for more than 40 years. During that time, in addition to financial advice he provided clients, widows and widowers frequently asked him for personal advice. He is a member of Covenant Presbyterian Church in Columbus, Ohio, and is married to Louise Davidson, Vice Moderator for Peace and Justice.