The loss of a spouse is often considered the single most stressful event in someone's life. Amid the pain and sometimes shock of losing a loved one, you somehow must find a way to carry on. It is often overwhelming to pick up the financial pieces since most of the decisions you made together, now are yours alone.

This eBook is here to help you walk through a realistic timeline to move forward. Inside is a checklist to help you get started.

A **WIDOW'S SURVIVAL** GUIDE

THE FIRST YEAR

SWAN FINANCIAL
ADVISORS, LLC.
PLAN • PREPARE • PROTECT

FIRST TWO WEEKS

FOCUS ON IMMEDIATE TASKS

CHOOSING A FUNERAL HOME

After your spouse has passed, a care coordinator, such as hospice, hospital, or nursing home staff, will be there to help guide you through immediate next steps. Once your loved one is transported to whichever funeral home you have decided on, go home, gather your thoughts and take a deep breath.

CONTACT IMMEDIATE FAMILY & FRIENDS

Reach out to close friends & family members to update them on what has happened. Consider allowing one or two people close to you to be there to help as you make all the necessary arrangements. If you have people to help, this will allow you to focus on what you need to get done.

Even though their primary focus will be to provide you with emotional support, they can also help with other tasks that need to be handled (answering condolence calls, planning meals, housekeeping tasks, pet care, etc.)

MEET WITH THE FUNERAL DIRECTOR TO PLAN FUNERAL AND/OR CELEBRATION OF LIFE

Planning this significant event is the most critical thing you need to focus on upon the passing of your loved one.

Due to the emotional state you are sure to be in, it's best to have a close friend or family member with you when you meet with the funeral director. This will help to avoid excessive expenses while you are in a very vulnerable state.

If your spouse was a veteran, they might be entitled to special arrangements and honors for their service. Be sure to visit www.va.gov (look for Burials & Memorials)

FIRST TWO WEEKS
CONTINUATION

BEGIN TO GATHER IMPORTANT DOCUMENTS

I know this might seem tedious and overwhelming. Below is a list of what documents you want to have on hand initially:

- Will /Trust
- Life Insurance Policies
- Marriage certificate and birth certificate of your spouse
- Death certificate (request at least ten certified copies)
- Spouse's military information, if applicable (DD-214)

REACH OUT TO YOUR TRUSTED TEAM OF ADVISORS

Trusted personal advisors, such as an attorney, a financial professional, and a CPA, are very valuable to help you during this difficult time. Here's how they can help:

Attorney: An attorney will guide you through the probate process and can help with the reading of the will. They can also help update your documents (will, living will, powers of attorney) to reflect your new circumstances.

CPA or Tax Preparer: The death of a spouse can make an already complex tax situation even more complicated. Your tax professional is a welcome partner in this process. He or she can help you determine which benefits are taxable and which aren't. They can help you maximize deductions and plan for all your upcoming tax obligations, which may include estate taxes and returns for living trusts.

Financial Professional /Advisor: Your financial professional is one of the most important members of your trusted team of advisors. They can help assess your current financial situation and the impact of your spouse's passing on your financial position going forward.

FIRST SIX MONTHS

START TO MOVE FORWARD

During this time, I encourage you to lean on your team of advisors. They will be instrumental as you file life insurance claims, apply for survivor benefits, and start the estate settlement process. Even though this is not a time to be making significant financial decisions, some things need to be handled sooner than later.

START WITH SELF-CARE

People grieve differently, and you should never be hurried through the process. You need time to clear your head and start taking baby steps into your new life. Whether you're 30, 60, or 75 years old, when you lose a spouse, you need to remember to take care of YOU through the process.

Get outside, take walks, spend time with friends, start a journal. Join a Support Group at your local church or visit www.griefshare.org to find a group near you.

It's time to start focusing on YOU!

GET A NOTEBOOK, WRITE EVERYTHING DOWN

As you start to pick up the pieces and make phone calls, you will want to write down information about each request.

Take note of the date, time of call, who you spoke with (get their last name or Operator #) and write down what you need to send. Be sure to take note as to when you should follow-up to be sure the task has been completed.

NOTIFY CREDITORS & CLOSE YOUR SPOUSE'S INDIVIDUAL ACCOUNTS ONLY

Contact the Department of Motor Vehicles and cancel your spouse's driver's license.

Notify the credit bureaus of your spouse's passing. There are three main credit bureaus: Equifax, TransUnion and Experian. You will want to monitor your spouse's credit history over the next few months to be sure that no fraudulent accounts are established in their name.

Be sure to list out any affiliation that may charge monthly or annual dues (country club memberships, gym memberships, golf club, etc.) Keep in mind that some country club memberships have Refundable Equity memberships, so be sure to check with the membership office.

FIRST SIX MONTHS
CONTINUATION

NOTIFY SOCIAL SECURITY OF YOUR SPOUSE'S PASSING

You will need to notify the Social Security Administration of your spouse's passing. You can do this by calling 800.772.1213 or by visiting www.ssa.gov. There are benefits available for survivors under different programs. Visit www.ssa.gov/planners/survivors for more information.

CANCEL SOCIAL MEDIA & PERSONAL EMAIL ACCOUNTS

The process for canceling online accounts vary. Some will require an original death certificate and other detailed information.

Facebook will allow you to request to change the account to a memorial account after you go through the necessary steps.

Google mail will require a death certificate, your personal identification information, and other information to verify the identity of your deceased spouse.

LIST OUT IMPORTANT BILLS

List out all your bills, making sure you have enough money in your account to cover the upcoming ones. If you do not utilize autopay, this might be a good time to enroll in that feature to be sure they stay current during this time of stress.

If your spouse had any credit cards, loans, or other bills solely in his or her name, provide those creditors with a death certificate. You may or may not be responsible for paying these debts, depending on the type of each debt, where you live, and the estate.

You want to be sure to contact the utility companies and any other services to remove your spouse's name and put it into your name.

VISIT YOUR BANK

Visit the bank that you and your spouse used and be sure to update them of their passing. It's practical to leave your joint account open for at least six months as you may receive checks that are made out to both of you after their passing, and you want to be still able to deposit them.

If your attorney has instructed you to open an estate account, your bank will be able to walk you through the necessary information required.

FIRST SIX MONTHS
CONTINUATION

FILE LIFE INSURANCE CLAIM(S)

You will want to check into possible life insurance proceeds: life insurance you and your spouse purchased through an insurance agent and any employer policies that might exist.

In the first case, contact your insurance agent about your spouse's passing. The agent can help you navigate the necessary paperwork to get things moving in the right direction.

If your spouse was employed, check with the human resources department at their employer to see if they had any life insurance there.

APPLY FOR SURVIVOR BENEFITS

In addition to life insurance and retirement assets, as a surviving spouse, there are likely other benefits available to you. These benefits may include Social Security benefits, Veteran's Administration benefits for military veterans, and employer benefits (pension). Current employers may also provide some benefits, so be sure to contact the Human Resources department.

If you are over age 60 at the time of your spouse's death, you may be entitled to survivor benefits in addition to a one-time death benefit from Social Security.

If your spouse received monthly disability payments from the military, you might be entitled to continue those monthly payments.

If your spouse was receiving monthly payments from Social Security or the Veteran's Administration at the time of their death, do not continue to cash the payments after his passing. The government will likely request those payments back. Notify the agency involved immediately of their passing to set the process in motion to stop those benefits from continuing to be paid.

SIX TO NINE MONTHS

YOUR NEW FINANCIAL LIFE

Now that you've taken care of the most time-sensitive financial to-do's, it's time to focus on the next steps.

These tasks generally come up within three to four months of your spouse's passing. Work at your own pace, but don't put them off indefinitely.

MEET WITH YOUR FINANCIAL PROFESSIONAL

In some cases, your spouse may have been the financial head of the house who oversaw all the accounts and money management. Now it's time to discover what you need going forward to meet your obligations of your life alone. Schedule time to sit down and talk through your situation with your financial professional.

To make the best use of your time, gather the following documents to review:

- ✓ Current budget/cash flow plan (monthly expenses)
- ✓ Current bills (including mortgage statement and balance)
- ✓ Any life insurance information on your spouse, as well as yourself
- ✓ Investment account statements, bank statements, stock certificates
- ✓ Retirement plan statements (401k, IRAs, Pension information, etc.)
- ✓ Long Term Care policy (if applicable)
- ✓ Tax returns for the last two years

Start to layout the framework for a new financial plan that meets your needs. In the coming months, start transitioning assets and accounts that suit your needs and goals.

UPDATE BENEFICIARIES

Updating your beneficiary information on all accounts is one of the most important things you need to do. Be sure to work with your attorney and financial professional to update the beneficiary designations on all of your important accounts.

CHECK-IN WITH YOUR ATTORNEY

It is good to keep in contact with your attorney for updates on the settlement of your spouse's estate. In most cases, the surviving spouse is responsible for the administration of the deceased spouse's estate. If necessary, a tax return is due nine months after your spouse's date of death.

NINE MONTHS TO ONE YEAR

TIDY UP
LOOSE ENDS
& REGROUP

FOLLOW-UP WITH OTHER PREVIOUS TASKS

Pull back out your notebook and follow up with all outstanding items that you previously handled. As you reach out to be sure death certificates and other paperwork was received, notate the issue as closed and check it off as done.

YOU'RE A PERSON, NOT A CREDIT UNION

Children may approach you, and family members or friends may ask for a loan. As much as you may want to help them out, please resist. You don't know what challenges you'll face that some extra money might help alleviate.

SELF-CARE IS CRUCIAL

Be sure to take inventory of your health and well-being. Make sure you are current on all your doctor appointments and medication. Set aside time to get your hair done, have a pedicure, schedule a lunch with friends.

To be truly "wealthy" encompasses far more than money. While financial well-being is extremely important, you need to be sure to stay connected in your friendships and relationships, your church/spiritual outlet, and other recreation.

ONE YEAR

A REMEMBRANCE OF LOVE

It's hard to believe it has been a whole year, but here you are. You have grown much stronger and more comfortable in your new life. Although it has not been easy for you, I am very proud of you. I know it is not a day that you look forward to, but I ask that you find a way to celebrate the love that you shared with your spouse. Honor their life, their love for you and their family, and do something that makes you smile as you reflect on your life together.

GATHER WITH FAMILY & FRIENDS FOR A CELEBRATION DINNER

This is a wonderful way to share stories, watch videos, flip through picture books, and relive beautiful memories.

RELEASE BALLOONS OR BUTTERFLIES

Releasing balloons or butterflies is a wonderful way to help children or grandchildren deal with their grief and celebrate their loved one's life. There is something wonderful about letting go of something tangible that helps in the healing process. To order live butterflies, visit www.abutterflyrelease.com.

TRAVEL TO A FAVORITE LOCATION OR SPECIAL PLACE

just a simple trip to a place that you loved to visit together allows us to reflect on wonderful memories. Take a group of family members or friends to help celebrate.

BRING A PICNIC TO THEIR FINAL RESTING PLACE

Many families, visiting the gravesite of a loved one is something that is done quite often throughout the year. On the anniversary of their passing, bring a picnic, sit and talk and share memories.

HONOR YOUR LOVED ONE IN A UNIQUE WAY

If your spouse has a special hobby or interest, you might want to incorporate that into a way to somehow honor them. Organize a fundraiser in their memory for a charity they were affiliated with, participate in an activity that they enjoyed, try to find ways to stay connected and celebrate them on this day.

I hope this information was helpful. I have faith that over time you will be able to move through the loss of your loved one.

If I can be a part of your journey, please contact me at **jennifer@swanfinancialadvisors.com** or by calling **404.618.6626**.

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SWAN FINANCIAL
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Jennifer is a financial professional with over 15 years of industry experience, but she is much more than someone who simply provides financial products or services. Her commitment to excellence, advocacy and service have led to a distinguished career, impacting the lives of her clients and others well beyond the scope of simple dollars and cents.

She has been cited for her knowledge by and has appeared on sources such as ABC, NBC, FOX, CBS, The Boston Globe, Newsweek, Fortune and Forbes. In addition to her hands-on work in the field with clients, she is a national best-selling author for her contribution to one of Amazon's best-selling books, “Dare to Succeed”, with Jack Canfield, creator of the Chicken Soup for the Soul series.

Some of her other works have been featured in Little Pink Book, Fortune Publishing, Wall Street Select, Huffington Post Online, Canton/Woodstock Family Life Publications, Forbes, Newsweek and various other local circulations. Mrs. Perri has established a nationwide reputation for her service and compassion in working with women and their finances through her educational workshops and events. She has spent over 15 years assisting women transition from many life events, with a strong focus on divorce financial planning and working with widows as they move forward in their new lives.

Jennifer is the recipient of several honors, including: 2013-2016 Women’s Choice Award, The Voice of Women, for Financial Services (USA Today); Kentucky Colonel Award for civic leadership from the Commonwealth of Kentucky; 2013 Editor’s Choice Award for her work in Dare to Succeed from Celebrity Press; 2013 Inductee into the National Academy of Best-Selling Authors; 2013 Acquisition International Financial Advisory Firm of the Year – USA; and four consecutive awards in the Best of Atlanta Business Hall of Fame from the City of Atlanta. She has recently been recognized by Continental Who’s Who as a Pinnacle Lifetime Member in the field of Financial Services.

Jennifer resides in Buckhead, Georgia with her amazing husband, Carmine and her four-legged children, Thor & Flora. She is the mother to three wonderful sons: Jeremiah, Justin and Jeffrey and the Gigi of 5 precious grandchildren.