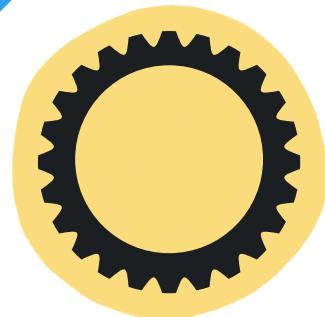


How to Manage Your Resources for Widows



6 Decisions to Navigate

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01 Why are we here?



Through interviews with widows and my 10 plus years of working as a financial planner with widows, I've learned widows are unique. While unique, they often face similar challenges. This whitepaper speaks to those challenges, shared experiences, and common life and financial planning decisions they need to navigate.

"BE KIND, FOR EVERYONE YOU MEET IS FIGHTING A BATTLE YOU KNOW NOTHING ABOUT" - WENDY MASS

Join me as we discuss the decisions you may be facing, such as:

- What to do with your home
- What to do when you "don't know what to do"
- How to take on what your spouse was doing
- Reintroducing yourself to society
- How to understand your finances better



How are you different?

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Life is changed after your spouse dies.

You lose social connections. You have to reintroduce yourself to society as an individual. You no longer have split responsibilities; you have to continue your own, and take over your spouse's.



You may be facing:

- Widow brain/brain fog
- Overwhelming grief
- Change in income
- Access to new accounts or money
- Unease about how to make the most of your financial resources



If your life is a puzzle, the pieces were thrown on the floor and you have to put it back together.

You probably never imagined you would be in this position, but you are getting through it – even on the days when life knocks you down.

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1. How do you navigate grief?

- Overwhelming emotions
- Devastatingly lonely
- Widow fog
- Uncomfortable questions
- Keeping the ship afloat
- Feeling uncoupled
- Reintroducing self to society as an individual
- Family and friends don't know what to say



Do you feel similarly?

You are grieving on your own timeline.

In addition to everything else you have to do, you may feel the need to find a support group and therapist.

Most widows I've talked with said having a therapist and support group was helpful or they wished they had them.

What other professionals do you want helping?

*You get to navigate grief on your own terms,
hopefully with the support of others.*

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2. What will you do with your home?

Your home is filled with memories. Some may be filled with happiness and belonging. Others may only have sadness and loneliness.

- Where do you want to age?
- Does it make sense to financially stay in your home?
- What are the tax consequences if you sell later?



You have two years from the date of death to sell your home and potentially get the \$500,000 Section 121 home sale exclusion amount, at which point it may drop to \$250,000.

Deciding when to sell has significant personal, tax, and financial consequences. **Don't forget to get the home appraised after death to establish any step up in cost basis.**

A financial planner can be a thinking partner to help navigate the options, so you can make the best decision for yourself.

Where you live is often one of the most challenging decisions to make. Consider your options carefully.

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3. How do you manage your resources?



You're down to one income. Your pension may have changed. How will your expenses change? You may feel less secure on one income.

You may have received life insurance proceeds. You may have accounts at various financial institutions. You may have VA benefits.

How do you manage everything together to meet your needs and avoid lifestyle changes?

The first step is taking inventory of everything. It may require looking through bank statements to understand your income and expenses. A review of your homeowners, auto, and umbrella insurance is vital.

From there, you can review your investments to better understand how you are invested *and* how the investments are supporting your income needs.

They may need changing or they may not.

Take it one day at a time.

It may take weeks or months to get an inventory of your resources before you can make good financial decisions.

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4. How do you reduce your taxes?

Tax brackets are compressed for single filers, which means many widows pay more in taxes.

Please don't wait until tax time each year to do tax planning. To potentially reduce what you pay in taxes, you should consider doing tax planning throughout the year, which may include:

- **Investing Tax Efficiently:** Use asset *location* strategies to put investments in different accounts, harvest tax losses, and invest in tax-efficient funds.
- **Roth Conversions:** If you have IRA assets, you may want to consider Roth conversions, particularly because tax rates may rise in 2026!
- **Charitable Giving:** If you are charitably inclined, learn more about Qualified Charitable Distributions (QCDs), giving appreciated stock, and donor-advised funds.
- **Family Gifting:** If you may pay estate taxes (state or federal) at your death, you may want to consider gifting strategies to family. Plus, you can see the joy it brings today.

There can be huge costs to not doing tax planning. Who wants to pay the IRS more money?



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5. How do you make it easier for family in the future?

There's a lot to do after death.



MAKE IT EASY

Paperwork, phone calls, letters, and more paperwork becomes a good portion of your life.



Many widows tell me they want to make it easier on their family.

It's important to review your beneficiaries (IRA, life insurance, and other types of accounts) to make sure they are working in coordination with your Last Will or Trust. You may need to update your Will/Trust and other estate planning documents.

You should have a binder with a list of financial institutions you use, account numbers, who to call if you are incapacitated, how to access your estate planning documents (including advanced healthcare directives), and what actions to take.

You should also have an aging plan. Families should be talking about what-if scenarios to make it easier to determine when a living situation needs to be changed.

Widows have navigated the complexities of aging and death. Many express a desire to make it easier on their loved ones.

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6. What's the opportunity cost of doing it yourself?

Widows often don't know who to turn to, feel embarrassed asking for help, or don't know who they can trust. They are usually really busy, too.

That often leads to no action or the wrong actions that end up costing them money, time, and additional problems.

You can try to DIY an estate plan online, but at what cost to your heirs?

You can try to manage your financial life alone, but at what risk and cost to your investments, taxes, and family?

You can try to work through your feelings without a therapist or support group, but at what cost to your mental health?

If there was ever a time to lean on others and hire professionals, after death is the time.

Taking the wrong action or feeling too paralyzed to take action can lead to huge opportunity costs – often many multiples of the cost of working with someone to help.

Hiring professionals to be a thinking or accountability partner can be vital when navigating loss.



09 Widows' Wisdom

Here is what widows wish they had known in advance and what they wanted you to know:

"Give yourself permission to not feel quite right, to look at the situation with beginner's eyes. What you are doing may feel like little steps, but every step matters."

"Take it one day at a time and know that it will get better. Even when I didn't believe, it did get better. The longer you are away from it, your life will get better. You have to believe it."

"Keep your friends close and family closer. That's what gets you through. When your spouse is gone, you have to have something to do or make something to do."

"I wish I had known I was going to make it through – that it would be okay. Also, I wish I had found a financial person and psychologist to go to when days were bad."

"A budget is huge. Have a plan. Pencil everything out and see where you stand."

Widows' Wisdom 10

Here is more of what they wanted you to know:

"I wish I had let go of my guilt. I wish I had not been in a rush to make housing decisions. I spent lots of time remodeling to create a new environment because that's where he died. I should have sat in it, take it all in, and let it unfold."

"I wish I had given myself a break. I thought I had to be strong. I didn't want to make him a taboo subject."

"It's okay to take care of yourself. It's okay to ask for help. You can survive this. Even though you may not think you are strong, you really are."



"I wish I had known how difficult and devastating it would be. It would have been helpful to know how I personally grieve and the amount of time it takes. It took five years. One day I was sitting in the house and thought, 'I am joyful today.' I didn't know why. It was stunning. At that point, I turned a corner."

11 Conversation Reflections

Through my conversation with widows, there were a few themes:

Loss, Grief, and Society

A spouse dying is overwhelmingly emotional. Your entire world changes. Your social invitations may disappear. Friendships may change, particularly with couples. Staying healthy is tough because almost everything is put on the back burner. Many find support with close family, friends, therapists, and grief or widow groups.

Everything Is Up In the Air

Your pensions or Social Security may stop or be adjusted. Financial accounts need to be changed, companies need to be notified of death, and you may be unsure what to do with your house. You may try to stay busy, appetites may disappear, and you may feel guilty for not knowing how to do something because it was your spouse's responsibility. Life's uncomfortable when everything feels uncertain and changed.

Financial Advice Industry Listens Poorly and Is Not Empathetic

Widows told me they were not listened to, respected, and were even laughed at. Advisors didn't ask questions or get to know them and what they felt was important. They met advisors who told them what to do – never building trust or being a thinking partner.

Healing Takes Time

Widows disliked hearing it themselves, but almost everyone said grief looked different years later, and it took time. Almost everyone responded to the question, "What did you do well?" with an answer along the lines of "I got through it." Many didn't believe it would get better, but it did.

Kindness Financial Planning

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Kindness Financial Planning, LLC offers financial planning and investment management to widows and caregivers.

Unlike other financial planners, I take the time to listen and understand what you are navigating before providing advice.

Financial Planning & Resource Management

- Pro-active guidance to help organize your financial life
- Long-term projections to help you decide how much to spend, give to family or charity, and how to invest
- Ongoing meetings, phone calls, and emails with a kind thinking partner

Tax Planning & Tax Preparation

- Tax planning analysis and strategies to potentially reduce your lifetime tax burden
- Coordination with your accountant or can make accountant recommendations to prepare your tax return
- Roth conversion analysis and charitable giving ideas



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Investment Management

- Low-cost, diversified, tax-efficient investment philosophy
- Asset location across IRAs, Roth IRAs, and brokerage accounts to potentially reduce taxes
- You sign off on the investment strategy, and KFP implements, including sending monthly income from the portfolio if needed



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Want to Talk?

If you are interested in sharing what's important to you and hearing how I may be able to help you, I invite you to schedule a conversation here: <https://calendly.com/kindnessfp/intro>

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Resources for you:

Widow/Grief Communities

- <https://modernwidowsclub.org/>
- <https://www.griefshare.org/>
- <https://widowedvillage.org/>



Widow/Grief Podcasts

- <https://www.widow180.com/>
- <https://widowwedonow.com/>
- <https://ttfa.org/>

Pro Bono Financial Coaching

- <https://wingsforwidows.org/>

Books

- *It's Okay That You're Not Okay* by Megan Devine
- *Bearing the Unbearable: Love, Loss, and the Heartbreaking Path of Grief* by Joanne Caciato and Jeffrey Rubin
- *The Year of Magical Thinking* by Joan Didion
- *Widow to Widow: Thoughtful, Practical Ideas for Rebuilding Your Life* by Genevieve Davis Ginsburg

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