

A SUPPORTER'S CHECKLIST

How to Help a Widow or Widower Without Adding Pressure

This checklist is not about fixing problems. It is about showing up well during a season when clarity, energy, and confidence are often impaired by grief. Use it as a guide—not a script. You do not need perfect words or solutions. What matters most is your presence.

CHECK YOUR INTENTIONS

Before offering advice, help, or opinions, pause and reflect.

- Am I trying to reduce their stress—or my discomfort?
- Am I assuming urgency where there may be none?
- Am I offering solutions before understanding the situation?

Good intentions do not guarantee good outcomes. Awareness matters.

UNDERSTAND WHAT GRIEF DOES

Grief is not only emotional. It affects cognition.

- Expect forgetfulness, indecision, and mental fatigue
- Do not interpret confusion as incompetence
- Remember that grief can last far longer than people expect

If someone seems “stuck,” they are likely overwhelmed—not unwilling.

SLOW THINGS DOWN

Many institutions move quickly after death. Survivors often feel rushed.

- Ask, “Does this decision truly need to happen now?”
- Help identify which decisions can wait
- Protect the survivor from unnecessary deadlines

Pressure rarely produces better outcomes in grief.

OFFER PRESENCE BEFORE ADVICE

Support is most effective when it is relational first, practical second.

- Listen without interrupting or correcting
- Avoid phrases like “At least...” or “You should...”
- Ask open questions: “What feels hardest today?”

Being heard is often more helpful than being helped.

RESPECT AUTONOMY

Widows and widowers are vulnerable to others’ agendas.

- Do not push housing, financial, or lifestyle decisions
- Avoid projecting your values or fears onto them
- Remember: it is their life, not yours

Support that removes agency is not support.

BE CAREFUL WITH FINANCIAL ADVICE

Money is one of the most sensitive areas after loss.

- Avoid offering financial advice unless asked—and qualified
- Do not assume you understand their full financial picture
- Encourage grief-informed professional guidance when appropriate

Well-meant financial advice can cause lasting harm.

WATCH FOR DECISION FATIGUE

Too many choices can paralyze or lead to regret.

- Help reduce the number of decisions they face at once
- Normalize saying “not yet”
- Support delays for irreversible choices

Fewer decisions today often mean better decisions later.

RECOGNIZE WHEN MORE SUPPORT IS NEEDED

Some challenges are beyond what friends or family can carry.

- Encourage counseling, coaching, or grief support when needed
- Avoid positioning yourself as the sole support system
- Respect boundaries—yours and theirs

Sustainable support requires a network, not a single hero.

BE CONSISTENT - NOT JUST IMMEDIATE

Support often fades after the early weeks.

- Check in months later, not just days
- Remember anniversaries and difficult milestones
- Continue invitations, even if they decline

Grief doesn’t follow a schedule. Neither should care.

One of the most important things you can offer a widow or widower is reassurance. Confusion, forgetfulness, and indecision are common after loss—and none of them signal failure. Grief affects how the brain processes information and time. When you help normalize this, you reduce shame and restore dignity. Let them move at their own pace, even when that pace feels uncomfortable. There is no “right” way to grieve, and no timeline they must follow.

