

Advice Knowledge Express: Navigating Social Security – Survivor Benefits Video Transcript

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Rayyan Anees: Hello, and welcome to the Navigating Social Security video series. I am your host, Rayyan Anees, of Advice and Planning. In this video, we will discuss survivor benefits and how they may apply to your family. Welcome back, Bob.

Bob McKinney: Thank you, Rayyan. It's great to be here.

Rayyan Anees: So, to get us started, can you explain what survivor benefits are?

Bob McKinney: Sure. Survivor benefits are payments that are made to an eligible spouse or ex-spouse, children or parents after your death. Survivor benefits you receive from a spouse or an ex-spouse's work record are commonly referred to as widow or widower's benefits.

Rayyan Anees: Bob, it appears that many people can receive survivor benefits. How does it work?

Bob McKinney: Well, we can explain that, but we're going to focus on spouses and their spouses as those are the most common recipients. So, there are several eligibility requirements and remarriage rules that apply to survivor benefits.

First is a married couple. You must have been married at least nine months to be eligible for a survivor benefit.

A divorced ex-spouse must have been married to the deceased for at least ten years.

If you care for a deceased spouse's child who is under age 16 or disabled, you can receive a benefit at any age. As a surviving spouse, you can collect a reduced benefit as early as age 60 or age 50 if you were disabled. However, if you remarried prior to age 60, you cannot collect a survivor benefit while you're still married.

Source: Social Security Administration - <https://secure.ssa.gov/apps10/poms.nsf/lnx/0300207001> Current as of September 2023

Rayyan Anees: The remarriage rules are very important to understand because it could be very costly for you to forfeit benefits. So how are survivor benefits determined?

Bob McKinney: Well, there are two steps to determine the benefit amount. First, you need to determine the maximum survivor benefit amount and then apply the survivor benefit percentage based on your claiming age. The amount of the maximum survivor benefit is also based on two factors. First is whether your deceased spouse filed for their own retirement benefits before they passed away.

Second, if your deceased spouse did file, was it before or after full retirement age? So, this chart shows how the maximum survivor benefit amount is determined based on those two factors. The maximum is based on the amount the deceased was receiving or eligible for at the time of death. Social Security will calculate this benefit for you.

Sources: Social Security Administration

https://www.ssa.gov/OP_Home/handbook/handbook.04/handbook-0407.html

www.ssa.gov/pubs/EN-05-10084.pdf. Current as of January 2024

Rayyan Anees: Now that we have a maximum survivor benefit amount from step one, do we move to step two?

Bob McKinney: Correct. The percentage of the maximum survivor benefit you receive as the surviving spouse is based on your age when you apply for the survivor benefit. A surviving spouse who applies at full retirement age or older receives 100% of the deceased worker's benefit amount. For a surviving spouse who is age 60 through full retirement age, they will receive 71 and a half to 99% of the deceased worker's basic amount based on the claiming age as shown in the chart.

A surviving spouse with a disability who is aged 50 through 59 is going to receive 71 and a half percent of the benefit.

Sources: Social Security Administration

www.ssa.gov/pubs/EN-05-10084.pdf. Current as of January 2024.

<https://secure.ssa.gov/apps10/poms.nsf/links/0300615320> Current as of December 2023.

Rayyan Anees: Bob. I noticed the chart headings says Survivor FRA. So, is the Survivor FRA the same as the FRA for retirement benefits?

Bob McKinney: No. And that is a very important distinction that we need to make. So, full retirement age for survivors is based on different years for your year of birth and can be up to four months prior to full retirement age for retirement benefits.

Full retirement age for survivors benefits is age 66 for anyone born from 1945 to 1956, it increases by two months for every year from 1957 to 1961. The survivor full retirement age is age 67. For anyone born 1962 or later.

Sources: Social Security Administration

www.ssa.gov/pubs/EN-05-10084.pdf. Current as of January 2024.

<https://secure.ssa.gov/apps10/poms.nsf/links/0300615320> Current as of December 2023.

Rayyan Anees: Can you share some examples around survivor benefits?

Bob McKinney: Sure. Let's look at three common scenarios.

So, if you're already receiving spousal benefits, your benefit will automatically convert to survivor's benefit after the Social Security Administration receives the report of the death.

If you are also eligible for your own retirement benefit but haven't applied yet, you have an additional option you can apply for it either retirement or survivor benefits now and switch to the other higher benefit later. If you're already receiving benefits for retirement, you can only apply for benefits as a surviving spouse if the retirement benefit you receive is less than what you would receive as a survivor.

Rayyan Anees: Thank you, Bob.

Bob McKinney: You're very welcome.

Rayyan Anees: That was a great overview of eligibility rules, benefit amounts and common scenarios involving survivor benefits.

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Unless shown, the source of the data shown is the Social Security Administration ([ssa.gov](https://www.ssa.gov)) as of September 2024.

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