

Grief in the Workplace: When a Co-Worker Dies

Recognizing the Impact:

When a colleague dies, even if you didn't know them well, the loss can remind you of your own significant losses. The void that is left can be significant, and it is normal to experience a range of common grief reactions. Allow yourself time to adjust; this is a process that takes time.

Common grief reactions and feelings include:

- Shock
- Anger
- Anxiety
- Fatigue
- Withdrawal
- Deep sadness
- Trouble sleeping
- Difficulty concentrating
- Absent mindedness
- Short-temper

Know that grief is unpredictable. It affects everyone differently. Depending on how close you were with the person, the nature of the death, and your own life situation, the loss may affect you for weeks or even months.

Remembering Your Co-Worker

Just as everyone grieves differently, you will notice that what helps people cope varies too. For some, talking about memories of the person who died is helpful. Others prefer to keep to themselves and not talk about it.

Here are a few suggestions for how you and your co-workers might cope with grief:

- Attend the funeral or memorial service. Suggest co-workers attend together to provide support to one another.
- Create a memorial board. Encourage your co-workers to post messages, memories, pictures or items that remind them of your co-worker.
- Consider holding a memorial service at your workplace for employees. A brief service of remembrance, particularly if not all employees attended the funeral, can be helpful. Even just a time to set aside for you and your co-workers to acknowledge your unique relationship with the deceased can be very meaningful.
- Create a book of unique memories for the deceased's family that shows how you will miss their loved one.

- Remember the person at staff meetings or annual events. These are times when grief reactions can resurface for you. Your co-workers may be uncomfortable talking about someone who has died, despite the fact that many are still grieving.

- Hold or join in a fundraiser for a special cause in memory of the deceased.

- Stay in touch with the deceased's family. Send a card or note every few weeks or months to let them know you have not forgotten them or your colleague.

Hospices throughout the country offer grief support to anyone in the community who has had a loss through death, not just for those who were cared for by hospice. Grief professionals who specialize in grief and loss can offer some suggestions or sources of support. They are a resource for those dealing with grief, as well as for those seeking guidance on how to support others who are grieving. To find a hospice in your area, or for more information, visit www.caringinfo.org or call 800-658-8898.