

GRIEF IN THE WORKPLACE

The impact of grief on the workplace is great. When someone experiences a loss, employees may experience lower productivity, the blues, or impaired decision-making abilities. Normal office communication patterns may fall by the wayside. Co-workers may experience stress in trying to identify the right ways to express their sentiments for another's loss. How you or your work group reacts to a co-worker's loss or the death of a co-worker will affect the grieving process a great deal.

WHAT TO EXPECT...

Your co-worker may seem depressed, withdrawn, short-tempered, absent-minded, or exhausted. These are normal emotions.

Set limits in the workplace if you feel that the person's need to talk about the loss is affecting your work. If your co-worker wants to talk, suggest specific times when you'll be in a better position to listen, such as lunch, during break, or after work.

You may have emotional feelings yourself, particularly if the loss is close to home and one with which you can easily empathize.

WHAT TO DO...

Listen, but know that you can't resolve the person's grief.

Help out by taking over a task or activity for the short term. Be specific in your offer.

Alert your supervisor if the grieving person seems to be getting worse, talks about suicide, or exhibits severe, continuing dysfunction. Covering up will not help.

Most importantly, don't ignore someone who is grieving. Look at them. Think how you might feel and what you would need.

WHEN SOMEONE IN YOUR WORKPLACE DIES:

People who work closely together are like extended families, and when a co-worker dies, friends at work grieve. Here are some suggestions for handling the death of a co-worker:

Create a memorial board. Keep a photo, card, or special item the person kept on her/his desk as a way to remember.

Hold or participate in a fund-raiser for a special cause or for the family of the deceased.

Create a book of memories to give to the family. Many people are not aware of the work life of people they love.

Conduct a workplace-only event. A luncheon or office-only memorial is a chance for co-workers to acknowledge their unique relationships with the deceased.