

# Coping with Loss

## *When Someone in the Workplace Dies*

People at work spend a good part of their daily lives together. When an employee dies, it is like having a member of your extended family die, and the sense of loss and grief can be felt deeply.

Grief is painful. The grieving process after someone's death can take weeks, months, and even years to run its course. The length of time spent grieving depends on the relationship you had with the person who died and the circumstances of the death. When a death is unexpected or particularly violent, the grieving process is often longer.

How we grieve is a very personal experience. However, there are some common reactions that many people share. They include shock, denial, anger, guilt, anxiety, fatigue, sleeplessness, sadness, fear, and trouble focusing. Even though you feel grief in your own unique way, joining others in the grieving process can be very helpful. To the left are some ideas on how your work group may take time to grieve.

Grieving is a normal process we all experience when someone we care about dies. The emotions we feel are painful and we may want to push the pain away or deny it is there. Sometimes, you may feel these emotions in a certain situation and not realize they stem from your loss – not from the situation at hand. This can cause all kinds of issues.

If your loss is particularly painful, you may want to seek help. A counselor can offer support and give you the opportunity to openly share your grief.

During the grieving process, people usually experience the reactions listed below. However, most do not necessarily have these emotions in sequence or of equal degrees. You will find that some people will want to talk about their grief and others will not choose to do so. There is no

“right way” to grieve. It is important to respect the differences between yourselves and focus on your own personal process.

**Shock** – When a person dies suddenly, shock is often the first response. It may seem like you don't “feel anything,” or you're going through the motions at work without being fully present.

**Denial** – You may feel like the situation is “unreal” or “unbelievable,” or you may just flat out deny that the person has died. This is a natural coping mechanism that cushions the blow of a painful loss.

**Guilt** – “If only I had known” or “I should have done more” or “I wish I hadn't said that” are all feelings of regret or guilt that may haunt you during parts of your grieving. Most people experience these nagging voices; this guilt will pass.

**Anger** – You may suddenly feel angry. It is a normal reaction to death, and it can be directed to anyone or anything. You could find yourself angry with God, at the person's family, at yourself, your boss, or your fellow workers. You may even find yourself feeling angry toward the person who has died and feeling guilty about it. Understanding where the anger is coming from makes it both easier to deal with and more likely to pass in time.

**Sadness** – Sadness and tears are an important part of grieving. It is normal to feel pain over the loss of someone and to experience feelings of loneliness and sadness. The loss can also trigger feelings about previous losses you have experienced. This is also normal.

**Acceptance and growth** – Eventually the process of grieving brings one to a place of acceptance and the opportunity to grow personally from the experience. Many people seek meaning in their loss and may channel their energy to special causes that help others. Acceptance never means forgetting; it means moving forward with special memories.

## How You Can Grieve

- Attend the funeral or memorial service. Give sympathy to family members and friends.
- Help organize a workplace memorial. During a workplace memorial, employees can gather, share their memories and honor the person who died.
- Suggest that a counselor come to the site. A counselor can meet with groups of employees who were particularly upset by the employee's death.
- Create a "Memory Book." Invite employees to share their feelings and memories about the employee in a book. The book can be offered as a gift to the family in memory of their loved one.
- Make a contribution. Giving a contribution in someone's name to a charitable organization or an educational institution is a meaningful way to honor the employee's life and service to others.
- Create a space for grief. In their grief, people often spontaneously leave flowers, notes or special items in a meaningful place. At work, this could be the person's desk or office, or a bulletin board nearby.

Need help or more ideas? Call your EAP to find resources near you. We're here to help!

Call toll-free, **24 hours a day**, seven days a week.

TTY Users can call:

Visit our website:

REGISTRATION CODE:

We offer counseling sessions face-to-face or telehealth consultations.