

Grief in the Workplace

When someone in the workplace is grieving, it impacts all of us. Here are some helpful suggestions to guide you through this emotional transition, whether you, a co-worker, or the campus as a whole has faced a loss.



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Coping with the death of a close friend or family member

When someone close to you dies, you must adjust to working or returning to work, in addition to coping with the loss. The early weeks or months may be especially difficult. Here are a few suggestions to help you through this emotional transition:

Be kind to yourself. Expect that you may feel more distracted or less productive than before your loss. Realize your mind or reflexes may not respond as quickly in the beginning.

Take time to grieve. Try to set aside time during the day or create ways to remember your loved one. Let people know if you need privacy or a place to cry or compose yourself.

Consider how much you want to share. For some, sharing grief and sorrow with co-workers helps us cope; for others, finding solace and comfort from elsewhere works best.



Choose co-workers with whom you feel the most comfortable, and who seem open to listening. If your feelings are intense some people may be uncomfortable. This might mean you need to find sources away from work to express your sadness.

Be understanding with co-workers. You may find co-workers are awkward or unsure how to interact with you shortly after the death. Many are well-meaning and want to be supportive, but may feel uncertain how to approach you or unsure of what to say, so they either say the “wrong thing” or say nothing at all. Let them know what level of interaction you would like (“It’s okay for you to ask how I’m doing . . .” or “I’d rather not discuss this right now. I’ll let you know when I can, if that’s okay?”). It is also important to respect people’s limits of being able to attend to your loss while continuing to carry on with their work.

Keep your supervisor informed. If you have difficulty adjusting to being back at work (feel fatigued, overwhelmed, unfocused, etc.), let your supervisor or department head know. He or she can be an additional source of support and may be able to help you with your work transition by making temporary adjustments.



Coping with the death of a close colleague or co-worker

When a co-worker or colleague dies, it can have a significant impact on those in the workplace. There is an element of “family” in many work groups, whether or not they spend time together outside of work. The effects of the loss will be determined by many factors, including the length of time working together, the nature of the relationship, the age of the deceased, the suddenness of the death, and other challenges that may be facing the work group at the time of the loss. The work group or co-workers who were close to the person may need grief counseling from outside the building.

Ways to Cope with Loss

Acknowledge the Loss - It is better to talk about what happened and its impact than to go on as if nothing happened. It may be helpful for people to check in on how they are doing at staff meetings, for those who wish to.

Acknowledge Individual Reactions - The loss will affect each person differently. Some will be more deeply affected or take longer to recover than others.

Be Kind to Each Other - This is not an easy time, and many adjustments have to be made. People may not be at their best. Be accommodating and gentle with each other, and find ways to share additional workload.

Self Care - Grief is exhausting. Try giving yourself extra rest, relaxation, exercise, and diversions. Express thoughts and feelings to trusted people and possibly keep a journal.

Give Yourself and Others Time

We sometimes have a tendency to deny the effects of loss and expect ourselves and others to *get over* a loss quickly. Allow the time it takes for each individual to process the loss. Be aware that the anniversaries of losses can trigger renewed grief. This loss may also bring up deaths of loved ones in the past that you will revisit.

Funeral and Memorial Events

Attending these events can help the healing process for many. Managers and principals can disseminate information and provide time for those interested to attend, when feasible. When events are out of town, people may want to find ways to memorialize the person locally. If you are uncomfortable attending such events you may find your own individual way of saying goodbye.

Honor the Deceased

You may send a letter or card to the family, or call or visit. Making meaning of a loss is one important way to process grief. Constructive actions that honor the person, such as giving to a charity, volunteering, fundraising walks/runs, and participation in blood drives can be very helpful in processing grief.

Be Resourceful

You may need professional assistance if you find yourself not able to function well as a result of the loss. Perhaps you have suffered other recent losses as well. Loss can trigger clinical depression which should be treated professionally.

Adapted from material by the Berkeley Department of Psychology, Denton and Frisco ISD Counseling Services.

The Grieving Process

Grief is a universal, natural, and normal response to a significant loss of any kind. The suggestions in this brochure may apply to losses other than death, including divorce, family move, “empty nest,” and others.

Grieving is a painful and tiring experience, but understanding how to cope in healthy ways can help you recover. The following stages of grief are not a neat process. People may not experience all of them, and new losses can cause a person to go backwards in his or her grief process, or revert to an old grief, temporarily.

- **Shock and Denial**—Feeling numb; as if it’s a bad dream; may last hours or months, depending on many factors, including whether the death was expected.
- **Anger**—May be towards others, yourself, the deceased, God—or all of the above.
- **Sadness/Depression**—May be reminded of other losses; isolate yourself; feel a deep sense of loss.
- **Guilt/Blame/Bargaining**—May blame everyone, including yourself and God; may *bargain* (“I would do anything if . . .”).
- **Fear/Worry/Confusion**—May have anxiety, panic, fears of own death or death of loved ones.
- **Hope and Acceptance**—May never be the same, but can lead a functional, meaningful life.

If you feel your grief or feelings around a loss are more than you can deal with, please seek help. Any campus counselor or member of the Student Services Team can provide you with a list of resources and/or help you find a counselor or other professional.