

## Supporting a Colleague When they are Grieving

The workplace is more than a location where people put in 40 hours and collect a paycheck. It's also where they form relationships and experience challenges, conflict, change, and successes together. They may spend more time during the week with their coworkers than they do with their own family members. Broadly speaking, they are a work family.

Employees may consider their coworkers close friends or merely acquaintances. But what binds them together is their shared experience of creating a product or delivering a service for their employer. So when a coworker is grieving, the workplace is significantly impacted.

Grief is a normal and universal reaction to loss. An individual's response to a loved one's death will depend on several factors, including the length and quality of their relationship, whether the death was sudden or expected, and other losses the person may have recently experienced.

It is best not to judge such an individualized and personal experience. Grief comes in physical, emotional, and behavioral forms. One's grief reaction may include, but not be limited to, any of the following responses:

### Physical

- Fatigue
- Headache
- Appetite changes
- Sleep changes
- Tearfulness

### Emotional

- Disbelief
- Helplessness
- Hopelessness
- Anger
- Guilt
- Confusion
- Sadness
- Irritability

### Behavioral

- Withdrawal
- Reduced work productivity
- Lack of concentration leading to errors
- Increased use of alcohol, nicotine, or drugs



### Coping Strategies

- Coworkers may not all be at their best, so be understanding. If an individual has the ability, offering help to a coworker who seems particularly overwhelmed would be a thoughtful action to take.
- The group's manager may want to formally acknowledge the death by calling a special meeting. The manager can consult with CARE's WorkLife Solutions, your employee assistance program (EAP) about how to conduct the meeting or request a counselor to co-facilitate it.

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- An individual may want to encourage the other work group members to discuss and agree on how they want to support their coworker.
- An individual can reach out to close friends or family members to get the support that may especially be needed at this time. Research has found that support is one of the most effective ways to cope with and heal from loss.
- This is a critical time to focus on self-care, so encourage your coworker to get plenty of rest, nourishment, exercise (at the minimum, take some extra walks) and pleasant, relaxing activities.

**Where to Go for Extra Support**

Should additional support be needed during the grieving process, individuals can consider seeking out resources outside their network of family and friends, such as:

- Their priest, minister, or other spiritual advisor
- CARE's WorkLife Solutions EAP
- A grief counselor
- A bereavement support group

