



## Death of a Co-Worker

Your co-worker has died. Whether their death was sudden or expected, hearing the news is a shock. Your workplace is no longer the same without them. Changes abound no matter if you had contact with them daily, weekly, monthly or annually; whether they were someone you saw in person on a regular basis or remained a familiar voice on the other end of the telephone.

You may be surprised by the strength of your reactions; or on the other hand you may be flabbergasted that you are having such minimal response. However, you are experiencing your grief, remember not to judge your reactions and try not to judge the way your colleagues are reacting. Everyone will respond differently at different times.

### **Remember that you have the right to feel what you are feeling.**

- \* Grief is not limited to certain people; everyone has the right to grieve
- \* Despite the fact that this person was not a member of your family, they were part of your work family. You may have spent more time with them than with the people you are closest to in your personal life.
- \* You deserve condolences. Their death is a loss that affects you in profound ways.
- \* There is no specific set of emotional or physical reactions that apply to everyone
- \* Grief comes and goes and may fluctuate every day, every hour, or vary according to your surroundings or circumstances

### Typical Reactions in the Workplace

- \* Consider what it is like for you to be at work without the person who died
- \* You may find yourself eager to be at work to be around others who share the great loss you feel
- \* On the other hand, you may feel apprehensive about being at work and away from home where you can grieve privately or even forget what has happened
- \* When they are at work, many people find a sense of comfort by being in or near the office, work station, or department that belonged to the person who died
- \* Others feel anxious about being there and go to great lengths to create a new route that does not involve going past an uncomfortable location
- \* You may feel more alone in your position without the person who died to consult with
- \* You may miss them when you have accomplishments that you long to share with them
- \* You may also feel relieved in some ways to not have them around
- \* Your grief may be triggered when it is time to take a break and they are not there to talk to
- \* It is not uncommon to find yourself daydreaming or unable to concentrate on projects that require your full attention

## Typical Reactions Outside the Workplace

Not only is your work life affected, but your personal life is impacted as well.

- \* You may find yourself distracted and thinking about the death even when you are not at work
- \* Your family may not understand why you are having such an intense reaction to this death and want you to be the same old person you always have been
- \* Going to a party, a family gathering, or an evening of fun and entertainment may not appeal to you, and this may be difficult for your friends and family to comprehend

You may be experiencing changes in your eating habits

- \* Perhaps you have lost your appetite or foods don't seem appealing
- \* On the other hand, you may be eating more than usual – or eating more of the wrong foods

Your sleep patterns may be interrupted

- \* Some people have difficulty falling or staying asleep or rise earlier than usual
- \* Others find it hard to get up in the morning or wish they could call in sick and stay in bed rather than come to work

Your thoughts about the meaning of life may change

- \* You may have an acute awareness about the fragility of life
- \* You may decide to change your goals, make new choices, and evaluate your priorities

## Helpful Actions

- \* Let your co-workers know how you are feeling; be available to give and receive support from each other
- \* Invite conversations about the memories you have of the person who died
- \* Set up a memorial space where staff can write a note, place flowers or candles, view a picture of the person
- \* Have an all-staff meeting facilitated by a grief specialist to allow for formalized sharing and reminiscing
- \* Establish ways in which you might carry on the legacy or values of the person who died
- \* Reach out to the family to let them know you have not forgotten the person who died