

Returning to Work after the Death of Someone Close

Someone close to you has died. As you think about returning to your workplace, you may be wondering: “Will people ask me about the death right away?” “Will I be able to focus on my work or tasks at hand?” “How should I respond when people ask me how I am feeling?” Depending on your work environment and the type of support you will be receiving, returning to work will vary for each person. While some may recognize this as challenging, others may find the routine of work to be comforting and a welcome break from the waves of grief. It’s important to remember, feelings of grief may ebb and flow throughout the workday.

Things to consider, when returning:

- * Notify your immediate supervisor and human resource department regarding your bereavement leave and grief support plan needs.
- * Slowly integrate and pace yourself back into your work routine, if your company or organization allows for this. Variations can include initially working half days.
- * It is important to note, you do not have to tell everyone your story and can offer a simple statement such as, “Although I really do appreciate your concern, I just can’t talk about that right now”. You can also further clarify that this does not mean you will *never* talk about the death, just not at that specific moment.
- * Allow for “grief bursts”; these are unexpected moments of crying or sudden intense feelings of grief.

At times, there will be little to no room to process your feelings of grief while at work. Healthy coping strategies can help you remain focused at work while allowing you to fully process your grief at a later, safer, and more ideal time. It’s okay to let your immediate supervisor and work colleagues know that you may be using some of the below mentioned coping strategies throughout your workday.

Coping Strategies:

- * Take breaks during the workday, allowing for a breath of fresh air by going for a walk or stretch.
- * Wash your face or pat your neck with a moist towel to help you feel present and refreshed.
- * Practice deep breathing by slowly inhaling air in through your nose and slowly exhaling air out through your mouth, repeating five to ten times.
- * Carrying a picture or an object that reminds you of your loved one can provide comfort and assist you in getting back into the present moment.
- * Keep a journal at your desk or workspace and spend a few minutes writing down your thoughts and feelings regarding your grief.

Ask for Support:

- * If appropriate at your workplace, find a “grief buddy” you can talk to, someone to take a short break with you, or to simply listen to you when your grief is challenging.
- * Speak to a grief professional individually or join a grief support group. Continue to communicate your grief support needs to your immediate supervisor, human resource department, and work colleagues. Organizations may have employee assistance programs that can help you find grief support resources as needed.
- * People around you may have a hard time understanding the depth of your grief and want you to get back to your “old self” quickly. Take as much time as you need to slowly return to doing things in the same way, or in a whole new way if it brings you more comfort. There is no timeline for the grief process.
- * Remember to be gentle with yourself, as you continue on your journey of healing.