

# Business As Usual Grief In the Workplace

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Most people spend more of their waking hours at the workplace than they do at home. The death of a co-worker or loved one can profoundly affect the workplace in a variety of ways. Nearly eight million people will be directly affected by death this year. More than half of these individuals will be taking their grief experience to work. Millions more will grieve other important losses—relationships, homes or jobs. For many people their work environment and co-workers may feel like family or community. When there is loss the impact on productivity and morale can be significant.

Grief left unattended will result in:

- Loss of motivation
- Absenteeism
- Depression
- Increased mistakes
- Anger

## **IF A CO-WORKER IS GRIEVING**

Faced with grief and loss, bereaved employees often believe they have to ignore their pain and “move on”. Managers and co-workers play a significant role in the successful transition of a grieving employee back to work. The more supportive the staff the easier the adjustment back into the routine of work. Keeping in contact with the grieving employee for support during their leave will also assist in a more comfortable return to work.

What to expect from a grieving co-worker:

- Disorganization
- Fatigue/lack of motivation
- A need to tell their story
- Inability to concentrate
- Tears and sadness

Your support of a fellow employee can make a real difference in how he/she survives right now. A grieving employee is faced with an overwhelming journey. While the need to mourn is normal and necessary, it often can be frightening, painful and lonely. Your supportive presence can make an important difference in how your co-worker heals. As a co-worker, increasing your knowledge about the experience of grief will help you better understand what your co-worker is going through.

How to help a grieving co-worker:

- Attend the funeral, memorial or prayer service
- Learn about grief

- Keep in contact with your co-worker
- Listen and support
- Avoid clichés
- Do not judge

## **IF YOU ARE GRIEVING**

If you are grieving, much as you wish, you cannot turn grief off when you go to work. It is important to accept your grief and recognize that you will not always be functioning at 100%. Grief is a process not an event you suddenly get over.

Here are some ways to cope with grief at work:

- Accept your grief. Recognize that there are just going to be days that are easier than others.
- Be flexible. When you experience a rough day, you might not accomplish all that you wished. That’s OK.
- Be gentle with others. Sometimes people feel uncomfortable and don’t know what to say or do. Understand that inappropriate or harmful comments are really attempts to offer you support.
- Take care of yourself. Grief is stressful! Adequate sleep, good nutrition and exercise are ways to build up resistance to stress. Avoid alcohol and drugs. Consult your physician if concerns arise.
- Seek support. Utilize the support system that is present in your life; family, friends, clergy etc. Your workplace may have an employee assistance program that might be helpful to you. Support groups or counselors may help you cope with your many different feelings and needs.

If a work environment is created where the employees feel supported and valued, grief can produce a positive impact on the work team and its ability to both work and grieve. Team cohesiveness will form and workplace productivity will be maintained.

*Each of our offices has resources on end-of-life issues available for the public on a loan basis. For more information about grief and loss, visit our website [www.hrrv.org](http://www.hrrv.org) or call us at (800) 237-4629.*

*Source: Hospice Foundation of America “Living With Grief: At Work (2004)*