

# COVID-19 | +stay informed

## Dealing with death and grief in the workplace

See steps for managers to take during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Feelings of sadness are normal after the death of a loved one. Grief during COVID-19 is more difficult because often we aren't able to physically be there for one another as we deal with the emotions. Also during this time, many people are delaying services. Those that are taking place need to follow social distancing guidelines.

Traditions of grieving together and holding a funeral or memorial can help people cope. We are not able to share grief in ways that we have in the past. So we need to find other ways of supporting one another. As a manager, it is important to know how we can support team members in the event of a lost loved one during this challenging time.

### Take these steps to help a bereaved worker

- Acknowledge. Immediately acknowledge the death with a note or flowers sent from management. Send a clear, simple message of support to the grieving person and to other staff to help them cope with the event.
- Ask. Asking how the bereaved member is doing and then listening to their response can be helpful.
- Be open. Maintain an "open door" policy with your team.
- Offer flexibility, if possible. Providing some flexibility in work hours, or time off, can help the worker cope with the combined stressors of work and grief.
- Consider attending a virtual service. If there will be a virtual funeral service, you or another workplace representative can attend and convey the company's condolences at that time. Make sure that you only attend with the express permission of the bereaved team member.
- Be patient. Being patient and understanding that the grieving process takes time and that the worker will not quickly "snap out of it" will also help.
- Offer resources. Provide information on bereavement services. (See the section below, titled Share information on bereavement support.)
- Respect the confidentiality of personal or medical information unless permission has been given to share it with others. Be sure to find out what can be shared and what is confidential.
- Expect that productivity may be less than perfect for a time.
- If tasks must be redistributed, thank team members who may be taking on additional work or responsibilities.
- Be available to listen. Expect that team members may need to talk about the loss several times, especially during special dates.
- Share information for finding additional support.

### Share information on bereavement support

Show team members and family members how to find information, resources and support, if they have experienced loss. With EAP services, team members can get guidance through the process. Resources can help ease some of the burden during this difficult time.

- Funeral planning. Team members and family members can call to speak to a specialist for assistance planning a funeral – from selecting a funeral home to cremation services or help with veteran's benefits and more.
- Financial assistance. Planning a funeral can be trying emotionally, and it can be financially burdensome as well. EAP can help with referrals to financial services, including a free first visit to a financial counsellor.

### Dealing with the loss of a co-worker

In the event of a team member's death, here are some additional steps to take as well as things to consider.

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- Support groups. EAP can connect team members with options for over-the-phone and in-person support groups to help with grief counselling. To get started, they can call the EAP programme.

#### **About these bereavement support services**

- All services are available 24/7
- Confidential in accordance with the law
- Included at no extra cost as part of your benefits
- Available to you and your covered family members

#### **Planning a remembrance for the loss of a co-worker**

Traditions of grieving together and holding a funeral or memorial can help people cope. We are not able to share grief in ways that we have in the past. So we need to find other ways of supporting one another.

Here are a couple of suggestions that may help:

- Consider arranging a virtual way for team members to share stories, memories and feelings.
- Think of personal ways employees can commemorate an employee from home. As examples, they could try lighting a candle, planting flowers or creating a commemorative photo journal.
- Also, you can plan a memorial, celebration or other service to commemorate a co-worker after the restrictions due to COVID-19 have lessened. For example, you can look into the types of places where you would want to hold the service, make a list of people to invite, and what you would like to say. Prepare for when you can put these plans into action.

These suggestions cannot replace the traditions of mourning together. But in this difficult time, finding new ways to help people find solace at a time of grief is worth the effort.

## **Your Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) benefit offers confidential assistance to help you manage stress, overcome anxiety and cope with trauma.**

To access your country-appropriate phone number, please log in to [livewell.optum.com](https://livewell.optum.com) using your company access code.



Sources:

American Psychological Association, <https://www.apa.org/topics/grief> (Accessed 4/2/2020) Last Reviewed January, 2020

American Psychiatric Association, <https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/coping-after-disaster-trauma> (Accessed 4/2/2020) Last Reviewed November, 2019

National Funeral Directors Association, <https://www.nfda.org/news/in-the-news/nfda-news/id/4972> (Accessed 4/3/2020) Last Reviewed April, 2020

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