



When a co-worker dies

Coping with grief In the workplace

People who work together are connected by being part of the same organisation – and many co-workers become friends. When a co-worker dies, it's normal for people in the workplace to be affected – whether or not they were close to the person. Some may experience shock or grief. Others may feel anger, guilt or even fear regarding their own mortality. This may be especially true now as we face the uncertainty that the COVID-19 pandemic has brought to bear.

These emotional reactions are natural. They may be felt immediately or can appear hours, days, weeks or months later. It's equally normal to experience no reaction at all. Usually these feelings will ease over time. Sometimes the loss can feel so painful that it interferes with someone's ability to work or function at home.

If you've experienced the loss of a co-worker, the following information may help you better understand and cope with your grief.

Common reactions to grief

A co-worker's death may produce a wide range of symptoms that may feel unusual to you. Remember that these are normal reactions, and while they are different for each person, they may affect:



How you think

- Poor concentration
- Shorter attention span
- Slowed problem solving
- Memory problems
- Difficulty making decisions



How you feel physically

- Headaches
- Chest or stomach pain
- Muscle tremors
- Difficulty breathing
- Elevated blood pressure



How you feel emotionally

- Depression
- Grief
- Guilt
- Anxiety or fear
- Feeling lost or overwhelmed



How you behave

- Excessive silence
- Changes in sleep and eating habits
- Lower work performance
- Social withdrawal

How to help yourself

- Acknowledge the death and your reactions to it. Give yourself permission to feel bad without labelling yourself. Take time to grieve.
- Get plenty of rest.
- Eat well-balanced and regular meals, even if they don't seem appealing.
- Talk to someone who will listen and allow you to experience your feelings.
- Don't try to "numb the pain" with drugs or alcohol.
- Realise that recurring thoughts and feelings associated with the death are normal. They'll decrease over time and become less painful.
- Remember – it's OK to ask for help if you're having trouble coping. Contact your Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) or a support group.

How to help your team members

Remember that, just like you, your co-workers are affected by the death. People experience grief differently. There is no right or wrong way to grieve.

Sadly, we're unable to spend time together in person as we practise social distancing. But you can, and should, connect with your co-workers, whether via phone, e-mail, social media or video chat.

Be aware that grief often makes people lash out with anger or other emotions. Don't take these emotional outbursts personally. Suggest available help, such as your EAP or a support group. It might take longer for some people than others, but with time and acceptance, the pain will lessen.

Your EAP benefit offers you and your family confidential assistance to help you deal with a wide range of personal, health or work-related issues. This free service helps you manage stress, overcome anxiety or depression, and cope with grief or loss. Our EAP specialists are available at any time, every day.



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 using your company access code.

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