

Facing the Unexpected – When a Co-Worker Dies

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People who work together are often like extended families. When a person dies, co-workers, like family members, grieve this loss. When the death is unexpected, as from an accident, it can be traumatic.

The Grief Process

Feelings and symptoms of grief are often expressed over weeks, months, and years. There isn't a specific timetable people follow while grieving. The brief time given to attend a funeral is only the beginning stage of grief.

The feelings of and reactions to grief may include shock, denial, anger, guilt, anxiety, sleeping problems, overwhelming sadness, concentration difficulties, and overall physical, emotional, and spiritual exhaustion. Often, a person feels several of these emotions at the same time, perhaps in different degrees. This is normal. The extent, depth, and duration of the grieving process will depend on how close people were to the deceased, the circumstances of the death, and their previous experiences with loss and death.

Take Time to Grieve

Take time to grieve as an individual and collectively as a work group. Here are a few suggestions:

- Create a memorial board – attach a special photo or special item.
- Hold or participate in a fundraiser for a special cause or for the family of the deceased.
- Create a book of memories for yourself or work group or to present to the family. Many people are not fully aware of the work-life of people they love. This special book will contain unique memories, a way for you to privately express feelings and memories.
- Conduct a workplace-only event, a type of memorial or luncheon to acknowledge the relationship with the deceased.
- Attend the funeral or memorial service – go as a work group, individual, or with your support system.

Remember

- People experience grief differently.
- Creating healthy memories is part of healing.
- A death generates questions and fears about our own mortality.
- Seek professional help if you have trouble coping or need additional assistance.

Adapted from the National Hospice Organization grief resources.

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