



Help is just a phone call away...

## Death of a Co-worker

People who work together are similar to extended families and when an employee dies, co-workers grieve. An unexpected death of a co-worker from illness or an accident can be especially traumatic for a work group.

### The Grieving Process

Feelings and symptoms of grief may take weeks, months, and sometimes years to process and heal. People do not grieve on a set timetable, however, over time, grief does ease.

The feelings and symptoms of grief may include: **shock, denial, anger, sadness, guilt, anxiety, sleep difficulty, exhaustion, and concentration difficulties.** Several of these can occur at the same time, usually in different degrees. Eventually, each phase of the grief process is completed and the person moves forward with life. The extent, depth, and duration of the process will depend on how close one was to the deceased, the circumstances of the death and one's own unique life situation. As time passes and grief is worked through, co-workers will find a sense of perspective (which doesn't necessarily mean that things will be the same), growth, and readiness to move ahead with their lives.

**You and your co-workers will need to effectively manage your grief. Some things to consider that can help a work group:**

**Create a memorial board.** A photo, card, or special item the person kept on his/her desk can be a way to honor the deceased.

**Hold or participate in a fundraiser.** The fundraiser addresses the feeling of "I want to do something" and the funds could be for the family of the deceased or for a special cause.

**Create a book of memories.** Many families are not aware of the work life of their loved one. You can give the book to the family. These will be special memories for the family and a way for you to privately express feelings and memories.

**Conduct a workplace-only event.** A luncheon or office-only memorial can be an activity for co-workers to share their special memories of the deceased.

**Attend the funeral or memorial service.** These rites honor the deceased and put them to rest. However, they are also for family and friends to help them process their grief.

**For additional information and support, call Best Care EAP at 402-354-8000 / 800-801-4182 or send an email to [EAP@BestCareEAP.org](mailto:EAP@BestCareEAP.org). A professional counselor will be available to assist you.**



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## **What to Expect:**

**People experience grief differently.** You or a co-worker who was particularly close to a person who died may feel discouraged, absentminded, short-tempered, or exhausted. These are completely normal feelings that will ease with time.

Some people find talking about the deceased helps them manage their grief. Others keep to themselves. Respect the fact that others may feel the loss more or less strongly than you or may cope differently than you do.

**A death generates questions and fears about our own mortality.** If a co-worker dies, you may feel guilty or angry at the person, at life, the medical profession or a religion. It may cause you to question your own mortality. These are normal emotions as well.

**Be aware of how you react to a deceased co-worker's replacement.** Anger or disappointment at his/her performance, personality or work style may be less a function of the individual than the sadness felt for the person they are replacing. Do not take out your grief on the new co-worker who has been hired to do a job.

**Seek help if you have trouble coping.** Professional counseling can help you manage the loss of your co-worker. An unusual deterioration in your performance could be a signal that this loss is affecting you more profoundly than you thought.

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