

Coping *with* Losing a Co-worker *to Suicide*

We spend many hours at work and often grow close to those we work with, sharing our joys and struggles. Over time, we may see them as friends or even extended family. So when we lose a co-worker, the loss can hurt deeply. It's especially hard when that death is a suicide. Here are some things you can expect after losing a co-worker to suicide:

- **Emotions beyond grief.** You may feel shock, sadness and a sense of loss – all of which are common reactions to sudden loss. But with a suicide, your feelings may be more intense. You may also feel other strong emotions, such as anger and guilt. It's normal for these feelings to come and go.
- **Feeling off balance.** After a co-worker's suicide, you may have a hard time focusing on work and may be more likely to make mistakes. (Keep in mind, if you use heavy equipment or your job requires a lot of focus, this can be a safety hazard for yourself or others. Always put safety first.) Outside of work, you may also have nightmares or flashbacks. You may have trouble sleeping or eating.
- **Asking why.** You may be wondering why your co-worker made this tragic choice. It can be frustrating when you don't have all the answers. It's often hard to accept that there may never be answers.
- **Feeling guilty.** It is common to wonder if you missed any warning signs or if you could have done anything to prevent the death. Keep in mind that some people show signs of thinking about suicide. Others take their lives without giving anyone an idea of their plan. In the end, the only actions you have control over are your own.
- **Remembering other losses.** Many of us have been touched by suicide or other sudden loss in our personal lives. Receiving sudden, unexpected news of a co-worker's suicide can bring up these feelings from the past. It is normal to have memories of your loved ones after a new loss even if you weren't very close to the person who died.

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Tips for coping

When you're grieving, it's more important than ever to take care of yourself. These tips may help:

- **Grieve in your own way.** There are many different ways to grieve, and no one "right" way. Some people prefer to talk with others after a loss. Others heal through writing or other outlets, such as art, meditation or gardening.
- **Share your memories.** It can be healing to talk with your co-workers over lunch or after work to share stories and talk about what all of you are going through. If you don't feel comfortable talking with people at work, reach out to a trusted friend or a professional.
- **Be patient with yourself.** Remember, working through grief doesn't come with a timeline. Depending on your relationship with the person who died, grief can last weeks, months or even years.
- **Maintain a healthy lifestyle.** Try to keep any healthy habits going, such as eating right, exercising or meditating. Although it may be tempting, avoid turning to alcohol and drugs to get you through this difficult time.
- **Be tolerant of others.** Each person's response to the news of their colleague's suicide is personal. What they say or do may be different from how you react and how you would expect them to react. Remember that grief is handled in different ways depending on culture, gender and personality.
- **Pay tribute to your co-worker.** You can honor your co-worker in many different ways, from holding a lunch time memorial service to volunteering as a team for a cause your co-worker loved.
- **Be welcoming to the new co-worker.** Eventually, your organization may bring someone new on board to take over your co-worker's workload. Although it may be hard, try and make this new person feel welcome.

Sometimes, the death of someone we care about can affect us more than we expected. Please call a professional if you have difficulty coping with this loss or if you just need support as you go through the grief process.

Need help?

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