

When Someone in the Workplace Suffers Loss

It's only natural for people to form relationships at work that are meaningful and important to them. When someone in the workplace experiences the loss of a loved one, we want to express our sympathy and support. Many people who find themselves in this situation ask:

- What can I do to help my grieving co-worker?
- What can I say that is appropriate in these circumstances?
- What can I expect will happen with this person in the coming weeks and months?

A grieving person may experience shock, denial, anger, guilt, sadness, and poor concentration. If someone in the workplace suffers a loss, you can expect that the employee will be experiencing these emotions and possibly more. For example, the grieving person may be:

- Short-tempered
- Depressed
- Withdrawn
- Behaving erratically
- Forgetful
- More emotional than usual
- Tired

You might notice that he or she may not be able to do normal tasks as easily as before, and absenteeism may increase.

The grieving process is not “on the clock.” The time one takes to heal from a loss varies, and you can expect that the person won't return to his or her “old self” for some time. The healing process can take several months. At the end of this process, the grieving employee is in a more accepting place regarding the loss and is “moving forward” in life.

What can you do to help?

First, you can express your sympathy by saying how sorry you are to hear about the loss, and ask if you can help in any way. You will not be able to resolve the person's grief, but you can listen and offer support. Be careful about how you express this support. Comments like “I know just how you feel,” or “Time will heal all losses,” or “It was God's will” are not generally reassuring and may elicit anger or hurt feelings from the grieving person. Respecting the person's grieving process is important. It takes time, and the process cannot be rushed or controlled. Remember, just being present is very supportive.

(continued)

The employee may want time alone, but may appreciate an offer to be included in a work or social activity. The person may need to talk about the deceased loved one and share stories or memories with you as part of the healing process. This is a great opportunity for you to help by listening and sharing your own stories if you knew the deceased. If these stories stretch into work hours and interfere with your job duties, you may want to arrange time during lunch or after work to devote your undivided attention to your grieving friend.

When someone experiences a loss, you may have your own emotional reactions. Death and loss frequently generate questions and feelings about one's own mortality. The death of someone else's child or spouse can evoke very strong emotions depending upon how much you relate to what has happened. You may want to talk with a counselor or other professional about your emotions and how you can further support the grieving employee.

Need help?

Call toll-free, 24 hours a day, seven days a week: 1-800-242-6220

TTY users call 711.

Or visit us at: members.mhn.com

and register with the company code: **santacruz**