

Supporting Co-Workers through Tangible and Intangible Losses

Grief affects the way our minds work – how we see the world and ourselves. During times of loss, grief is the filter through which we receive information and made decisions. Remember that grief is not only related to the mourning and loss of a loved one, but grief also occurs related to changes.

Almost all emotions can be part of a grief reaction and many emotions may be experienced with dizzying speed and intensity – fear, anger, relief, despair, peace, guilt, numbness, agitation and a seemingly bottomless sorrow may all be part of our grief. There is no order to your feelings and no time limit on grief.

It hurts when others don't mention our loss – and sometimes it hurts when they do. We need some time alone to get our bearings. We may want to regain our identity by resuming our routine, or even plunge into activities that keep us too busy to feel.

Grief is not a weakness, it's a necessity. Processing grief is how we heal from our loss and move on.

You now have two jobs. You have responsibilities to your employer and your job is important to you. But the work of grief is just as important. It can't be put aside or ignored – the only way past grief is to move through it. Grief is hard and often lonely work, but you can find comfort and guidance along the way.

Helping a Co-Worker Deal with Grief

- Acknowledge your co-worker's loss and grief. Don't wait until the right thing to say comes to you. There is no right thing. The wrong thing to say is nothing.
- Avoid comparisons. "I know just how you feel..." What you know is how you felt, but we never really know another's feelings. Everyone's relationship and reactions are unique.
- Offer specific help. Many people are too tired or numb to decide what help they need.
- Listen. Grieving people often need to tell their stories over and over. Listening without judgment or interruption can be the most important gift you can give.
- Allow the person to grieve at his or her own pace. Your ability to not judge the length of time it takes will be a sense of relief to the person grieving and avoid placing pressure on him or her to conform to what other people think is the "right way" to grieve.

Supporting Each Other in the Physical and Virtual Workplace

- Respect privacy. You may be hearing personal and privileged information that should not be repeated. Honor closed doors and quiet moments.
- Watch out for other employees; vivid memories and feelings may surface. Some unspoken grief may become noticeable.
- Support the efforts of others to help the employee. This sad time can be an opportunity to increase staff awareness of mutual support, teamwork and the values that are part of your work together.
- Reach out. Remember that our current circumstances mean we need connection more than ever!

When can ENCOMPASS help?

Occasionally someone might need professional help to deal with grief. If your grieving co-worker is exceptionally teary or despondent for more than two week, shows signs of drug or alcohol abuse, or has a dramatic change in eating or sleeping habits, he or she may need extra support.

Encourage the affected employee or co-workers to call ENCOMPASS! It's confidential, it works, and the services won't cost you anything!