



## ***Tips for Employees:*** **Death of a Co-worker**

The death of a co-worker, even following an extended illness, can be difficult to manage. Contact the **C-SEAP at 1-800-821-8154 or 303-866-4314** if you have questions or need support.

### ***Be Aware of Grief Symptoms***

#### **Emotional & Physical Symptoms**

- All humans are different and therefore have different reactions to significant losses. Typical grief responses include **lack of motivation, anger, sadness, shock or confusion** (APA, 2016; HMS, 2003).
- While grieving, many of us feel or experience physical symptoms. These symptoms may include **loss of appetite, limited motivation to exercise or engage in other activities, poor sleep, and fatigue**. Other physical symptoms may include restlessness, headache or other pain, dizziness or muscle tension (HMS, 2003).
- It's important to see a health care professional if your physical symptoms persist ... talking with a counselor can also help control physical symptoms.

#### **Complicating Factors**

- Those who have a history of depression or anxiety and/or who have experienced a particularly significant or traumatic loss – including loss due to sudden and unexpected death, or loss due to suicide, or traumatic or violence loss - may have a **higher risk** of “unremitting” or complicated grief (APA, 2004; HMS, 2003). In these situations, there may be “a marked, broad change to all personal relationships ... [and/or] a sense of rupture in personal beliefs,” or intrusive memories or nightmares (APA, 2004; HMS, 2003).
- While there is **no typical timeframe** for grieving a loss, if you feel your grief is distressing, has been getting in the way of managing daily tasks, has persisted for an uncomfortable timeframe, or has left you questioning relationships or beliefs, it could be helpful to talk with a counselor – call the **Colorado State Employee Assistance Program at 1-800-821-8154**.

### ***We Express Grief in Many Ways***

- Some of your colleagues or co-workers may express their grief **externally** through talking and showing emotional responses while others process loss **internally** with focus on problem-solving and task completion (ACA, 2011). There is no right or wrong way - most of us will adopt both styles. It's important to express and process the loss in a way that is natural for you and avoiding self-judgment for the way you are grieving.
- Be **supportive of each other** as your team re-builds and copes following the loss. Be available, if it's comfortable, to co-workers who need to talk. If this disrupts your work flow or serves as a trigger for your own grief, gently **express** this to your co-worker, **provide** C-SEAP as a resource, and **engage** your supervisor for support.
- We all manage the discomfort of grief differently – **avoid spiritual or canned references**. Just listening and offering basic and applicable statements of empathy like, “this sounds hard,” “that sounds difficult,” or “let me know if I can listen” can be helpful.
- Let others know what is helpful to you as you grieve the loss of your co-worker

### ***Workplace Considerations following Death***

- Should your team desire to reach out to the decedent's family, follow appropriate workplace channels. Typically, an HR representative, your supervisor, or an appointed representative (identified by a supervisor) will coordinate any response to the family. It's important to **respect the privacy** of the decedent's family.
- Be aware of **potential triggers** – the empty work space of your deceased co-worker, receiving emails or reminders that involved that co-worker, anniversary of death, etc. Grief can re-ignite with these triggers.
- If your motivation to get **back to a normal work pattern** is persistently waning, you are craving substances or behaviors to help cope with the loss, or you feel continually distressed by the loss, consider talking with a counselor – call the **Colorado State Employee Assistance Program at 1-800-821-8154**.

#### ***Sources:***

- American Counseling Association (ACA). 2011. Current trends in grief counseling.
- American Psychological Association (APA). 2016. Grief: coping with the loss of your loved one.
- American Psychological Association (APA). 2004. A new approach to complicated grief.
- Harvard Medical School (HMS). 2003. Dealing with grief and bereavement – the family health guide.