



Tips for Employees: When a Co-worker is Grieving

When a co-worker is grieving a significant loss, others around them may be uncertain about how to support them. It's also possible that co-workers will experience symptoms of grief or thoughts of past losses. Offer simple and sensitive acknowledgement to your co-worker and notice if the situation is impacting you. 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 experience emotional and physical symptoms. These symptoms may include **loss of appetite, limited motivation to exercise or engage in other activities, poor sleep, headaches, muscle tension, restless and fatigue**. (HMS, 2003).
- It's important to see a health care professional if your physical symptoms persist ... talking with a counselor can also help alleviate 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, trauma or violence - 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, your co-worker may be managing bereavement for an extended period of time. If it feels appropriate, offer contact information for the **Colorado State Employee Assistance Program - 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 loss 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.

Workplace Considerations following Death

- If your team wishes to reach out to the co-worker who is grieving, follow appropriate workplace protocol. Typically, an HR representative, your supervisor, or an appointed representative (identified by a supervisor) will coordinate any formal response to the family. It's important to **respect the privacy** of the co-worker.
- **Acknowledge** your co-worker's loss with a personalized note or verbal statement. Lack of acknowledgement may create uncomfortable feelings for the co-worker, while too much focus can also create discomfort. Avoid religious statements or simple reassurances such as “everything will be all right.”
- If your co-worker's loss is triggering uncomfortable and persistent reactions for you, or for more information on offering support to a co-worker, 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.