

SUPPORTING YOUR GRIEVING CO-WORKER

Grief is a painful, normal human response to loss. As a coworker of someone who has just experienced a loss, you probably want to do the “right thing”, but chances are you aren’t sure exactly what is the right thing to do or say to help the grieving person. This sense of helplessness can sometimes be the biggest barrier to offering support. The following suggestions are aimed at helping you provide support to your grieving coworker.


1. Be yourself...not a healer. Healing is the exclusive territory of the bereaved. There’s no time limit. How individuals manage grief and healing is very individualized.
2. Check yourself. Don’t let your feelings of fear and helplessness cause you to avoid your coworker.
3. Acknowledge the loss. It’s hard but important. Don’t try to take away the pain with your words.
4. It’s OK to cry with your coworker. If a hug feels appropriate, ask first.
5. Feel anger at loss but consider how to channel it for good.
6. Help meet a practical need if you see it. Consider offering supportive acts that may assist the coworker. (For example, helping with childcare, preparing meals, running errands, house cleaning, and other ways of pitching in to make the going a little easier.) Coordinate these acts of kindness with the bereaved person’s close friends or relatives. Don’t make “feel better” statements: (“Be strong”, “I know how you feel”, “Time will heal”, etc.)
7. Don’t ask questions or make statements associated with how the event could have been prevented.
8. Let your feelings match your participation in events designed to support your coworker.
9. Respect family wishes for privacy, until you get a clear signal.
10. Be patient with your coworker, now, and in the future.



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11. Use your past, personal experience at grief and loss to help you be supportive. Avoid sharing your experience in a way that communicates, “I know how you feel.” Simple sharing of your feelings of loss is fine. Avoid comparisons.
 12. Send a card, each one will be read.
 13. Expect tears. They’re normal and part of grieving.
 14. Include the employee in social events that might be planned in the coming weeks; don’t assume the employee wouldn’t attend.
 15. Make sure others know about funeral and memorial arrangements.

Call the EAP for confidential support, guidance, or counseling for difficult grief memories of your own. Suggest the EAP to your coworker if it seems appropriate

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