

Dealing with Death at Work

When a coworker dies whether from accident, illness or violence those closest to the coworker may find it hard to be on the job, doing the work they had formerly shared with the deceased coworker.

You may not work as efficiently or get as much done for a while.

Less recognized is the fact that even those who didn't work directly with the employee may also grieve. If you are recovering from the death of a coworker – whether the coworker was a close friend or a casual hallway acquaintance - keep these points in mind:

Business As Usual? Not Yet

Expect that your work will be affected in some way by the event. You may not work as efficiently or get as much done for a while. Perhaps you'll need some time on the job to get in touch with your feelings of loss. You may feel a mix of denial, sorrow, guilt, and anger. Working through these feelings eventually leads to acceptance and peace of mind. Ignoring them is prescription for anxiety and depression.

Keep In Touch

Others are feeling the way you feel. Communicating your feelings can be a great relief both to you and others. Talk about your sense of loss, and share memories and stories about the departed. Praise, criticism and laughter at the deceased's foibles or antics are all healthy. Allow yourself and others to cry or be angry. Some people may feel that if only they had done something differently, the departed would be alive today. Be there both to participate and to listen.

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What You Can Do

You can take action to help yourself and others recover from a recent death. Many companies offer counseling and group recovery programs.

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Ask your employee assistance program for information on what help is available. If the death was job-related, do what you can to make the workplace safer, so that such deaths can be prevented in future.

Healing takes time. But if you can't shake the feeling of sorrow, reach out for help. Contact your EAP for guidance and support. Though it may seem hard to take this step right now, the rewards of once again feeling whole are well worth the effort.