



# Recovering from a Coworker's Death

The death of a coworker is a difficult experience, particularly if it is unexpected. Recovery of individuals and of your work group depends to a great extent on the leadership provided by you, the group's manager. This leadership can help guide members of the group as they mourn and memorialize the deceased coworker, and helps the group members return to effectively perform their duties.

## Helpful Guidelines

### **Provide a private area where coworkers can mourn.**

Initially, close friends and associates may feel shock and intense grief. If the loss is to be resolved, a private place that allows sharing of memories and discussing loss can ease the "grief work" essential for recovery.

**Address coworkers' need for information.** Show your concern by making a concerted effort to provide timely information about the death. If the information is not readily available, admitting that you don't know about the circumstances is more comforting than remaining silent.

**Serve as a role model for appropriate grieving.** Set an example by showing that you are actively grieving, but still able to function effectively and perform your duties.

**Consider offering a "debriefing" or grief group.** If coworkers do not know each other well or have difficulty talking about their loss, the EAP+Work/Life program can provide an on-site Licensed Professional Counselor to facilitate a meeting to help encourage staff to discuss their loss.

**Consider holding a memorial service,** especially if coworkers cannot attend the funeral. A memorial service can be very helpful and often is a turning point in restoring a work group to normal productivity. The memorial service should honor the deceased and provide an opportunity to say goodbye. Unlike a funeral, a memorial is not a religious service, but provides an opportunity for friends to speak about the deceased, and the person's contributions to the work. This can help lift the morale of the group.

**Have employees take the lead role rather than senior officials.** Memorial services are most effective when planned by employees and especially when the closest associates of

the deceased are given key roles. The involvement of the "best friends" in the service can be a comfort for everyone.

**Reach out to family members.** Attending the funeral, sending cards, visiting the bereaved family and offering help are all positive, healing activities.

**Support informal rituals for healing.** Friends might join together to clean out the deceased person's desk, for instance, or organize a campaign for contributions to an appropriate charity.

**Return to the work routine in a respectful way.** Try to uphold values held by the deceased, and strive toward goals that they particularly valued.

**Don't treat a new employee as a "replacement"** for the deceased employee. Reorganizing responsibilities and moving furniture, for example, can help spare the new employee and others more pain.

**Remind employees about recurring symptoms** and the services of the EAP+Work/Life program. Normal grieving can produce sleeplessness, diminished appetite and intrusive thoughts of the deceased, which typically subsides with time. Some employees may find grief long-lasting, and could benefit from short-term, professional assistance and support. Let them know that they can call the EAP+Work/Life program to talk to a Licensed Professional Counselor for coping strategies. If needed, a Work/Life specialist can help them find a local grief support group.

Remember... In a crisis, EAP+Work/Life support is available 24/7. Just call!

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