



# What to Do When a Coworker Dies

When a coworker dies, it can often affect us in ways that we may not anticipate. We spend a tremendous amount of time with our coworkers and often become friends. On the other hand, we are part of the same daily world, yet we may not be close friends. We may feel the loss daily as thoughts return to past and present projects that were shared. We may relive jokes shared at the water fountain.

It can be confusing and sometimes scary for coworkers to experience the depth of these feelings. People often try to disassociate from these thoughts or try to convince others that they don't have these feelings. It is realistic and appropriate that a coworker can be affected. The death may also take on a symbolic meaning, reminding us that it could happen to us and how unpredictable life and death can be.

## Reacting and Coping

It is not unusual for individuals to react to grief in different ways. Some may mourn publicly while others do so privately. Some may react immediately, while for others, grief will be delayed and unexpected feelings that are difficult to deal with will be demonstrated. There is no right or wrong way to go through the grieving process.

A number of factors may affect the way we respond to crises and death. Past experiences, of course, have a major influence. Our philosophical view of the world, our religious beliefs and our customs will shape our reaction to a coworker's death. Our health determines how much physical and emotional energy we can put forth to deal with the loss. Our network of social support will affect how we deal with the event.

If you are personally grieving, it is important for you to try to acknowledge your feelings and seek some support. Here are some suggestions for how to cope with a coworker's death:

- **Find someone you trust** with whom you can talk about the death and your response.
- **Remember, your EAP is completely confidential** and available to you 24 hours a day.
- **Talk about past events** that relate to the death, whether that is a personal experience with death or something you remember about the coworker. It is good to talk about the pain you are experiencing in a safe environment.
- **Establish some healthy habits for yourself**, such as eating healthfully and getting enough sleep, and avoid unhealthy habits such as turning to drugs or alcohol to numb the feelings that you are experiencing.

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