

PATHWAYS CENTER for GRIEF & LOSS

WHEN A CO-WORKER IS GRIEVING

If someone in your workplace has experienced a loss, it will have an effect on all who come into contact with that co-worker. If you are one of those people, you may feel uncomfortable or perhaps uncertain. “What should I say?” is a common question. Some coworkers experience feelings of helplessness. You are not alone. It is important for you to know that. What matters most is not *what* you say, but the fact that you care.

Grief is a natural, healthy response to loss. Mourning is the way you express your feelings of grief. One needs to feel safe and accepted to be able to mourn. It is a process that takes many months. Your acceptance of your co-worker's feelings - whatever they are - and your willingness to listen will help your co-worker to mourn. It is the best gift you can give.

COMMON GRIEF RESPONSES

- Lack of concentration
- Difficulty sleeping
- Unexpectedly tearful
- Feeling of unreality
- Restlessness
- Increased sadness during holidays and special days
- Emotionally overwhelmed or out of control
- Mood changes
- Exhaustion
- Need to talk about the deceased
- Desire to withdraw from others
- Feelings of anger

WAYS TO HELP

- Be willing to listen
- Avoid clichés (“At least he didn’t suffer” or “I know how you feel”)
- Don’t avoid the person
- Be sensitive for *months* to come
- Don’t offer advice – just listen
- Offer to share the person’s work load, if possible
- Cards, phone calls, hugs, lunch dates can mean a lot
- Know that each person grieves differently – avoid judgments
- Allow the tears and don’t turn away

An Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is an additional resource, if this is available to you. Understanding and adjusting to loss is a common issue brought to EAP counselors. Hospice & Community Care’s Pathways Center for Grief & Loss is another option for support. There are a variety of support groups to choose from, a monthly bereavement newsletter or individual consultations available. Call for more information.