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.