

Grief and Loss of Co-Worker

Loss and coping with loss are experiences that touch us throughout our lives. There are many kinds of loss, each of which brings its own kind of grief. Saying goodbye to someone or something close to us is like saying goodbye to part of our life and who we are.

Because we spend so much time with our co-workers, the loss we feel is significant when they are gone. Many describe their work teams as being like a family and a loss of a colleague can be surprisingly impactful. Feelings associated with this loss are essentially the same as those related to other losses.

Feelings can include fearfulness, denial, anger, guilt, despair, hopelessness and numbness.

We may try to avoid our feelings, particularly since we are at work and must keep paying attention to our tasks, but denying or minimizing them only postpones the day we must face the loss. We may experience several reactions to various degrees, depending on whom we lost and our closeness to them.

Physical reactions can include insomnia, needing more sleep than usual, loss or increase in appetite, chest or throat tightness, weakness, lack of energy, breathlessness and shortness of breath.

Changes in thinking can include preoccupation with the loss, confusion, forgetfulness and difficulty concentrating.

Working Through Grief

The physical, emotional and mental processes of grieving can disturb our "normal" life. Each loss is unique, and the route and length of each person's journey through grief will vary. However, it is important to move in a healthy direction.

Take Care of Yourself

Grieving can wear you out. Get enough rest, proper nutrition and exercise during this period. Accept the help of others when you are feeling overwhelmed.

Accept Whatever You Are Feeling Is Okay

Not everyone progresses through grief in the same way.

Express Your Feelings

Talking with colleagues informally, either individually or in groups, can be helpful. Touching on humorous memories is appropriate, even in this time of sadness, as is acknowledging negative things about the person.

Find a Way to Commemorate

Get together with your colleagues and find an appropriate way to memorialize your lost co-worker. Consider a memorial service at work, a plaque, the dedication of a piece of art, or planting a tree. As a guide, ask yourself and your co-workers what the deceased person themselves would have suggested.

It's Okay to Feel Happy Again

Loss may allow you to learn about yourself, to change and to grow. Returning to comfortable, full functioning at work is a sign of moving in the right direction.

Grief Has No Time Limits

Feelings about the loss may be present for days, weeks or even months, particularly when tasks or events at work come up that remind you of the lost co-worker.

Know When to Seek Help

Intense feelings normally accompany grief for a period of time. However, if you are concerned with the amount of time it's taking to pull through these feelings, you may wish to seek professional help.

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