

## SUPPORTING A CO-WORKER WHO IS GRIEVING

It is sometimes difficult to know how to respond to a co-worker who is going through a personal loss. It can feel awkward and you may be at a loss for words, particularly if your relationship with your co-worker is minimal. An often-appreciated response in such situations is to acknowledge the co-worker's loss and let them know that you recognize the magnitude of their pain. Sincere expressions of sympathy are often the best and can come in the form of a simple "I'm sorry for your loss."

Many people are uncomfortable with expressing strong emotions publicly and will likely find responding to others' public emotions unsettling. As a result, there is a tendency for them to shy away from a grieving co-worker. This reaction to loss may leave the grieving coworker feeling isolated and you feeling guilty for not responding in a more supportive manner. One way to negotiate this is to write the grieving coworker a note, send a card, or bring the person flowers. These expressions of sympathy shows support without a face-to-face conversation at the workplace.

Taking the time to really listen to a grieving coworker is also a very important way to demonstrate support. It involves a bit more emotional energy, but this is a positive way to help the grieving employee to accept the reality of the loss. Talking about their loss will allow them to increase their acceptance of the death.

These tips can help you support a co-worker who is grieving:

- Acknowledge that your co-worker is grieving and offer heartfelt support, either in person or in writing.
- Expect temporary changes in your co-worker; increased sadness, tearfulness, or isolation.
- Respect a closed door or desire for privacy.
- Offer appropriate assistance, such as cooking a meal, helping with errands, or caring for children or pets.
- Continue to include the co-worker in social plans and let them decide if they are ready to accept the invitation.
- Listen to the story of their loss.
- Consider the coordination of a group acknowledgment, such as flowers, a card, or group attendance at a service.
- Ensure that support continues when the employee returns to work, as the first few days back at the office may be challenging for them.
- Be sensitive to upcoming holidays or other triggers that might be challenging for your co-worker.
- Recognize that grief and loss rituals vary across cultures. Consider learning about your co-worker's customs in order to demonstrate cultural sensitivity.

