

CRITICAL INCIDENT

Supporting a Coworker Through Grief and Loss

Grief is the natural process of mourning a loss. People grieve in many different ways. It is a very personal, individualized process that may include a wide range of emotions. Here is some information on what to look for and how to support a co-worker during this difficult time.

Common emotional responses

Your co-worker may experience any or all of these emotions:

Sadness	Shock
Fear	Anger
Guilt	Anxiety
Numbness	Helplessness

Common physical reactions

Emotional distress can also lead to physical responses such as:

Exhaustion	Restlessness
Headaches	Appetite changes
Difficulty Sleeping/Nightmares	Startled Reactions
Gastrointestinal problems	

Common cognitive responses

Grief can lead to difficulty concentrating, feelings of confusion and changes in productivity. Be patient and know that they may need additional support with their work during this time.

How to communicate with someone who has lost a loved one

It can be difficult to approach a person who has recently lost someone and who is grieving. Many people find it awkward to talk to the grieving person and feel at a loss for words. The following are some suggestions on how to start the conversation:

Start by acknowledging what has happened in a direct way. For example, you might say: "I just heard that your [spouse/child/friend] [died/passed away]."

Express clearly the fact that you care. For example, you might say: "I'm so sorry to hear that this happened."

Be genuine in expressing how you feel. For example, you might say: "I feel at a loss for words/I am not sure what to say, but I want you to know that I really care and I am here for you." You might add, "You are in my thoughts and prayers" if that is a genuine statement for you.

You can also ask about how the person is feeling in going through this. Validate the person's feelings to the extent that you can and that is a genuine response to you, even if you might respond differently in that situation.

Offer support. For example, you might say: "If there is anything I can do to be helpful, please just tell me what I can do for you, now and in the future." Feel free to also probe into specific things you can do to help if you're willing to do that. "Can I help out with anything practical? Is there anything you need done that I can help with? Also, please know that I am here if you ever want to talk."