

Helping a Grieving Co-Worker

When a friend or co-worker has experienced the death of a loved one, it is often difficult to know what to do or say. This guide will offer suggestions on ways you can show your support.

Show your support

- Send a sympathy card or hand-written note.
- If you can, attend the funeral.
- Stay connected. Some people are afraid of what to say so they avoid the person or the topic at all costs. This is usually not helpful.
- Avoid clichés such as:
 - “God needed another angel.” “It was his time to go.” “You can have other children.”
- Be supportive. Say things like:
 - “I’m here for you.” “I’m sorry this is so hard.” “Let me know how I can help.”
- It’s always ok to ask your co-worker what they need. A simple phrase: “What do you need right now?”
- If the person wants to talk about their feelings, it’s ok to just listen and say nothing.
- If they cry, that’s ok too. (A little Kleenex and a caring touch goes a long way).
- Try not to judge their reactions or behaviors. Everyone grieves differently.
- Grief can be a long process. Note the anniversary date of the death on your calendar to remind yourself to reach out at that time. Holidays and birthdays might also be difficult for your friend.

Where can I go for additional help?

If you are worried that your co-worker might be thinking about harming themselves, it’s always ok to ask about that too. You might say, “I know this loss is really hard for you and I really care. I’m just wondering if, through all this, you’ve had thoughts about suicide” or, “I noticed you’ve been really quiet/withdrawn/been giving your stuff away, etc. I know you’re grieving, but I’m just concerned that maybe you’ve had thoughts of suicide?” If the person says yes, use the Question, Persuade, Refer technique, or call your EAP to help you and your co-worker to work through it. If you’re not comfortable asking about suicide, call your EAP for help.

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