



## Bright Ideas for Employees

# Coping with the Death of a Co-Worker

### They Were Like Family

Our co-workers are like an extended family. We spend most of our waking hours with them, forging special bonds of trust and friendship.

So it's not surprising that a co-worker's death can be particularly difficult to deal with, especially if you were close to the person, or if the death was sudden and tragic.

You may experience anxiety or guilt if the death occurred in the workplace or if your last encounter with the person was not positive.

Even if the death resulted from a prolonged illness, you may still experience shock or depression.

### An Emotional Response is Natural

How we cope with loss varies by person and can be affected by our personal beliefs and other stressors in our lives.

For some of us, it may be hard to focus on our work for a while. Others may find it more difficult to get back on track, resulting in mistakes or careless work that could get us in trouble.

It's normal to have an emotional response when you lose someone you care about. However, preoccupation with death may present safety hazards, especially when operating equipment, driving, or performing intricate operations.

In more extreme cases, a co-worker's death may cause you to become tense and irritable, adding to an already stressful work environment or creating new problems elsewhere in your life.

### Pay Attention to Your Health

A strong emotional response to death can directly harm your physical health. Long-term feelings of deep sadness can disrupt your eating and sleeping patterns, robbing you of needed energy to move on with your life.

For those with arthritis, high-blood pressure, diabetes, or other chronic health problems, even a brief deviation from prescribed diet, medication, or exercise regimens can have serious consequences.

Prolonged grief frequently leads to depression, which has been linked to many other health concerns such as heart disease and stroke, obesity and eating disorders, diabetes, and some forms of cancer. Some people may become dependent on alcohol or prescription drugs to cope with their sadness.

Grief-related stress has also been shown to disrupt the immune system. Bacteria-fighting t-lymphocytes, or t-cells, react more sluggishly, making the body more vulnerable to colds and infections.

Trying too hard not to think about death can also cause problems. Those who attempt to "lose themselves" in their work risk burnout, a state of intense mental and physical exhaustion that can cause cardiovascular and neurological problems.

### Help Yourself and Others

Share your feelings. Your other co-workers may be experiencing the same feelings you are. Mutual support can help everyone get through the grieving process.

Grief is a natural process that requires time, but if you are struggling, a qualified mental health professional can help you adjust to the loss. Call the EAP.



For help with any issues you are facing, **contact the EAP** for free, confidential, counseling or 24-hour crisis support.