

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

When a Loved One Dies

At some point in our lives, we all have to deal with the death of someone we care about. Everyone reacts differently to loss, but there are some general feelings most of us will share, including shock, disbelief and numbness. Whether the death is anticipated or unexpected, the person close or distant to you, it is normal to feel some intense emotions.

Here are some tips to help you recognize and manage some of the reactions that follow a death:

Guilt

- You may wish you had said good-bye.
- You may wish your last conversation had been different.
- You may wish you had been kinder or more loving.
- You might even feel guilty that you don't feel guilty at all.

Sadness

- For the person—you may feel they were robbed of the best years of their life.
- For the family—you sympathize for a child who has lost a parent or for someone who has lost a spouse.
- For yourself—you may feel an acute emptiness and find it hard to believe that the deceased person has gone from your life forever.

Helping Yourself

- Every time you experience a "hole" of great grief and sadness, you are actually moving one step closer to healing. This is a normal part of grieving.
- Talk to trusted friends or family members about your feelings.
- If you feel you have no one to talk to or are experiencing intense, unmanageable grief, talk to a counselor or your doctor.
- Look after yourself. Now more than ever it is essential to eat healthily, exercise regularly and allow time for rest and relaxation.
- Try to re-establish some routine in your life as soon as realistically possible.

Helping Others

Being ready to listen to the people left behind is a valuable gift to them. Talking through feelings is an important part of the healing process. You might also try the following:

- Express your appreciation for the qualities you valued in the deceased. Offer this information to those preparing the eulogy or write a note to the family explaining why you valued the person. Relate a personal anecdote involving the deceased. Humor is acceptable.

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- Find out if there is a special manner in which the family of the deceased would like them to be acknowledged or remembered. Perhaps the deceased had special wishes, such as memorial donations to specific foundations.

- If the deceased was a co-worker and your workplace is holding a specific memorial to honor the person, let the family know and invite them to participate if they wish.

- Use your personal style of caring and expressing sympathy.

- It is acceptable to cry with the bereaved family.

- Humor and expressions of physical affection, like a hug, are often welcomed.

At the Office

- Having an office "debriefing" can help.
- Join co-workers in trading memories about the deceased person.
- Talk to a co-worker one-on-one to help you sort through your feelings. He or she may well share the same emotions.
- Create a memorial board.
- Make a book of memories to give to the family.
- Be particularly sensitive in your approach to the deceased worker's replacement.
- Seek professional help if you have trouble coping.
- Set up a scholarship fund in the person's name.

Whether you are grieving the loss of a loved one or helping a bereaved friend or relative, understanding —and engaging in—the emotions that arise in the grieving process can be an important aid to healing.