

When an employee dies...

Here is an example to show how to put these strategies together: You see an employee being atypically quiet following the death of a coworker. You can approach her/him and say something like, "I noticed you're quieter today. I just want you to know that it's ok to react this way (*validating behavior*). When people feel sad or numb or overwhelmed, they often withdraw (*validating feelings and behavior*). What do you need right now? If you do need anything, I hope you will let me know, and I'll do what I can (*validating needs*).

Process Loss

When an employee dies, your employees have a shared loss, even though each person may respond differently. As a manager, you can help your staff begin to mourn their loss and support each other as a group. PENN Behavioral Health EAP can provide an on-site counselor to facilitate this process. For more information regarding on-site Critical Incident Debriefing, call: **1-888-321-4433**.

The death of a coworker can leave you feeling any number of feelings; sad, empty, helpless, annoyed, guilty, overwhelmed. As a manager, your job continues to involve maintaining the productivity of your department, but when one of your staff dies, your department's effectiveness is affected, as well as your own effectiveness. How can you balance your own feelings, being sensitive to your staff's feelings, and being productive? This is a daily challenge: however, because people are generally uncomfortable with death, you may be further challenged. Some strategies to help during this time are:

- ◆ Accept your own feelings of grief
- ◆ Accept your feelings re: work concern
- ◆ Validate the individual responses to loss
- ◆ Listen to and validate the individual needs your staff may have in response to grief
- ◆ Look for behavioral reactions to grief, and again, validate those reactions
- ◆ Give staff an opportunity to process their loss as a group

Accept Your Own Grief

You are human, and you are effected by this death. Deal honestly with your grief. Be a leader in terms of making it OK for all to grieve.

Accept Your Concern for Work

Do not allow yourself to feel guilty about your need for continued productivity. It serves no one if work piles up or if business is lost. The issue is not whether work will continue, but how. Have answers for how things will get done, yet be sensitive to staff needs during this trying period.

Validate Individual Responses

Each culture has its own comfort level with death, as well as its own reactions and traditions. In our society, many people are uncomfortable with the concept of death and loss. Some of your staff may believe that their reactions are abnormal. You can help by supporting them and their unique grief responses and by reassuring them that whatever they are feeling is normal.

Validate Behavioral Responses

Not everyone knows how to identify and express their feelings verbally. Here are some behaviors that your employees may show in response to loss: day-dreaming, mistakes, absent-mindedness, withdrawal or isolation, avoiding the deceased employee's desk or other reminders of the deceased, irritability, tearfulness, hyperventilating, fainting, dizziness, hyperactivity, inappropriate humor/laughter. These are not the only reactions you may see, as reactions are as individual as people. Be aware and supportive.

Validate Individual Needs

Everyone's needs are different. Some need space, others want to talk. Allow each person the dignity of their own process. You might set aside an office or conference area where staff can be alone and cry. Others may need to leave work to spend time with loved ones. Be open and creative in your support for their needs.



Give Opportunity to Process

Sometimes it is helpful to begin the grief process as a staff, using professional staff to facilitate. Contact your EAP for information on this service.

For more information regarding on-site Critical Incident Stress Briefing, call **1-888-321-4433**.