

Helping someone who is grieving

Be a good listener

Grieving people need to talk about their loss, acknowledge that they have been through a difficult experience. You can't fix their grief but you can be there, hear their story, and share their journey.

Be a shoulder to cry on

Allow them to cry with you, crying helps the release of emotions and this helps with healing.

Be in touch with them

Drop in, call on the telephone and say "I was thinking of you today", write a letter, send an email, remember special days like Christmas, birthdays and anniversaries.

When someone has experienced a loss, there will be big and small adjustments to be made in their lives. These could bring uncertainty, frustration, fear, sadness and change as each new day comes along. Grief is about adapting to change in life, thoughts, hopes, beliefs and the future.

Be a friend

Often being there is all that is needed to support someone who is grieving.

(Adapted from the writings of Doris Zagdanski)

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Death in the Workplace Version 1.0 of 2016

Death in the Workplace

Information for Managers

When An Employee Dies

People go to work expecting “business as usual” and to go home at the end of the day to their families. The last thing they expect is for an employee to die, from natural causes, or as a result of a tragic event.

When an employee dies, it naturally causes high levels of stress amongst staff and there will be obvious disruption to the workplace. It is important that management have an appropriate strategy in place to deal with this issue should it arise.

When an employee dies the workplace can often be thrown into chaos. If the death occurred as a result of an industrial incident, fire, murder, or similar tragic incident, employees have to deal with a range of issues in addition to shock and the loss of a work mate.

These issues generally relate to concerns about how and why the situation occurred and often result in feelings of anger, guilt, fears for personal safety and a need for someone or something to blame.

Management should discuss who is going to cover the deceased employee’s workload in the short term. It is usually advisable to get temporary cover, as opposed to asking other employees to take over the workload.

Letting your staff know when an employee has died

When an employee dies, you will need to inform other staff with sensitivity and compassion. You should try to inform those closest to the employee first and in a private place if possible.

Supporting staff

Grief is a normal and natural response to loss, but needs to be understood so it does not cause further problems. Often friends and co-workers of those affected do not understand the significance of the event for the person who has experienced it, and there is a sense that they should ‘move on’ or ‘seek closure’. In reality people move through grieving or traumatic experience at different paces.

Staff may be helped to deal with their grief by:

- organising activities in remembrance of the employee who has died
- having time off to attend the funeral
- holding a special ceremony at the workplace
- taking up a collection for the family
- planting a tree on-site
- establishing some other memorial
- putting a tribute in the newspaper.

People are usually surprised by how much a crisis or trauma affects them. It frequently

changes the way they think, their values, habits, feelings and behaviour. It influences most aspects of their life. People usually underestimate the time it takes to recover from a crisis or trauma.

For other workers, simply getting on with standard routines, and avoiding any special activities related to the death, may be the best way of putting the event behind them. We each deal with our grief in our ways. There is no right or wrong way.

Helpful hints for management

Regardless of the cause of death, it is helpful if management:

- send a clear, simple message of support to staff to help them recover from the event
- have an “open door” policy to staff
- provide a qualified counselling service
- involve a counselling professional who can also act as a point of advice and support for staff
- make contact with the employees family without delay and be available to answer any questions, or to give help to the family, in the early days after the death. The family may wish to visit the site of the death and meet co- workers who helped their loved ones.