



## Dealing with the death of a coworker

The death of a coworker can be a devastating and painful experience. You may be surprised at your sorrow. However, keep in mind that you may have spent more time with this person than with many of your relatives. This person was part of your “work family.” It helps to acknowledge the grief you feel over this loss.

A death can bring up questions and fears about your own mortality. It can bring up feelings of guilt or anger at the person, life or the medical profession. It’s not unusual to question aspects of your life or relationships. You will adjust to this loss and these reactions will decrease over time.

### What you might feel

- **Denial:** It’s difficult to accept the death of someone you were close to or saw every day. Disbelief, numbness and shock are often part of the initial reaction.
- **Anger:** Your sense of loss may cause you to lash out at others or blame yourself.
- **Bargaining:** You may have flashes of memories of your coworker. If the memories are unpleasant, you may feel regret and find yourself making “if only...” statements.
- **Depression:** You may feel sad and lonely. You may feel a loss of energy or enthusiasm for your job
- **Acceptance:** You find a way to accept the reality of the loss and adapt to current circumstances.

### What you need to know:

- **You may have some of the feelings described or none at all.** Although these feelings typically occur in stages, you may go back and forth between stages. You may also experience more than one of these emotions at the same time.
- **There is no “right” or “wrong” way to grieve.** Your reactions are determined by many factors. The circumstances surrounding the death, cultural values, religious beliefs, life experiences and traditions all may affect your experience of grief. It’s not unusual for people to be reminded of earlier losses as they grieve.
- **Some people describe grief as “drowning” in sadness or feeling a “flood” of emotions.** How much and how long someone feels this varies. But, these feelings are a normal part of the grief process.
- **Grieving is difficult.** It can be helpful to remember that grief is one of the most difficult universal experiences. You are not alone in experiencing grief.
- **Focus on healing and honoring the memory of your coworker.** Depending on how close you were to your coworker, you could check in with their family members or do something special in their memory, such as making a donation to their favorite charity.



### Tips for coping with grief

- **Take your time.** Don't judge or measure your reactions by those of others.
- **Consider going to the funeral or memorial service.** This may give you a chance to say goodbye and to offer comfort to the family. It helps when they hear stories of their loved one and how valued they were at work.
- **Talk.** Share feelings about this loss with friends and family who love and support you.
- **Pay attention to your body's needs.** Try to maintain a routine that includes physical movement, eating healthy and getting enough rest. Taking good care of yourself helps you to manage the task of grieving.
- **Tears may come out of the blue.** It may be something small that triggers a sad thought or feeling. Be patient as this will lessen over time.
- **Allow time to grieve, but also give yourself breaks from the grieving process.** You might want to try taking 15 minutes a day when you immerse yourself in your grieving experience. Once the 15 minutes are up, you can aim to focus your attention on other things.
- **If you follow a religion, get support through its practice.** Seek out faith mentors. Make time for quiet meditation.
- **Avoid alcohol or other substance misuse.** This can be harmful to your health, mental health and interfere with your healing process.

### Resources

Friends and family members are important resources in helping you cope with the pain of bereavement.

And don't forget: We're always here for you. You can call us for in-the-moment support, information, resources and local counselors for you and your family members.

Confidential services are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.



**Get started today**

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