

Grief: Tips for Managers

As a manager or supervisor, you will be expected to support employees following a critical incident. You may worry that you will say “the wrong thing” in these circumstances. Your presence and compassion are the most important resources during this time. The following is a list of ways you can support employees through the grieving process.

- Remember that grief is important, necessary, and inevitable. Simply “snapping out of it” will not help your employee return to a productive and comfortable life.
- You can help by creating an environment where the grief process is honored and supported.
- Set an example of support and professionalism. Your actions and attitudes will be what others remember and follow.
- Express your condolences. Sincerity and simplicity will let the grieving person know you care.
- Stay in touch with grieving employees. You represent the workplace to your grieving employee.
- If you are grieving too, make time to take care of yourself as well.
- When you talk with your employee ask questions that are helpful, such as:
 - What are your needs for time? Privacy? What do you want me to tell your coworkers? What can we do to help you with your work? When you return would you prefer to talk about your experience, or would you prefer to concentrate on your job? Listen carefully to these answers, they may change from day to day.
- In the workplace, respect the privacy and dignity of your employee. Don’t repeat information without a clear understanding that it’s okay to do so.
- Honor the quiet moments, closed doors, and tears.
- Whenever tasks are redistributed, be sure to thank the other employees for their additional work.
- Support and encourage others in helping the grieving employee.
- Expect the best from your employee. You can accept less than the best for a while and still express confidence in them.

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Talking to a grieving employee:

- Use accurate language. When referring to a death for example, use died rather than a euphemism such as passed away.
- Ask questions such as:
 - “Would you like me (or anyone else) to share any information with the others?”
 - “What information and details would you like them to know?”
 - “When you return, do you want to talk about your experience, or would you prefer to concentrate on your work?”
 - “What are your needs for time?”
 - “What are your needs for privacy?”
 - “What can I (or we) do to help you with your work?”
- Listen carefully to the answers. They may change day to day.
- Keep asking; keep listening.
- Make resources easily available through EAP and support materials.
- Recognized that employees may indirectly try to get you to make decisions for them. Instead direct them to the EAP and their own support network (friends, family).

Supporting the workplace:

- Respect privacy. Don’t repeat personal or privileged information without a clear understanding or permission to do so.
- Honor those private moments, closed doors and quiet moments.
- Expect tears as a normal part of grieving.
- Other employees’ memories and feeling may surface, and unspoken grief may emerge.
- Include the grieving employee in informal social events.
- Whenever tasks are redistributed, be sure to thank other employees for their work in helping to share the burdens.
- Support the efforts of others to help the employee; this is an opportunity to promote mutual support, teamwork, and other organizational values.
- Expect the best from the grieving employee. You can accept less than their best for a while, and you can express your confidence in them.