



Finding Peace

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.

- **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 each. 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 may all 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 others have gone through it before you and have grown from the experience.
- Focus on healing and honoring the memory of your coworker. Depending on how close you were to your coworker, you could check in with his or her family members or make a donation to a 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 good bye and to offer comfort to the family. It helps when they hear stories of their loved one and how respected he or she was on the job.
- Talk. Share feelings about this loss with friends and family who love and support you.
- Pay attention to your body's needs. Try to exercise as much as you have been, eat healthy meals, and get 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, it will be time 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 and other mind-altering substances. They can make healing a challenge.

Ways to Help Deal with Grief

It's important to know some ways to help yourself and others who are mourning. Here are some common questions:

- **What should I say to someone who is grieving?**
Many people feel uncomfortable around someone who is grieving because they don't know what to say or do. Avoid dismissive statements like, “You'll be fine,” “Your loved one wouldn't want you to suffer” or “It's time to move on.” When you don't know what to say, say nothing. Put your hand on the mourner's hand. Listen. Bring over a meal. Simple acts like these are supportive and comforting.
- **I've had a loss. When should I expect to feel okay?**
You can expect to feel better over time. Typically, the first year is the hardest. You may feel you're on a roller coaster sometimes, having a mix of good days and bad. At some point, you'll realize you're having more and more good days.
- **How can I make my grief go away faster?**
Grief is natural and serves a purpose: You're recovering from loss and adjusting to a changed life. It takes time. Rushing it would be unfair to your needs and would dishonor your feelings about the significance of your loss. Grieving is like the healing of a wound. Give yourself time, patience, and lots of self-care.

Stages of Recovery From Trauma and Loss

We like to make sense of things. During times of stress, this feels even more important. Knowing about the different stages of grief can help you feel “normal.” It can help to find order in a time of confusion.

Stages of recovery aren't perfect or universal. We don't all go through them in the same way. We may not even go through all the stages. The most important thing is to let yourself grieve in your own way.

These stages outline how we often experience a crisis. You may not go through these stages in order and you may find yourself returning to earlier stages.

Stage 1: Shock, Denial, and Disbelief

- The mind argues the crisis isn't real or can be reversed.
- Feelings go numb.
- Life feels like a dream.
- This stage gives you time to take in the situation.
- Expect ups and downs in the healing process.

What to do:

- Feel the pain (pain is proof you're human and starting to heal).
- Remember the greater the hurt, the more time you may need to heal.
- Give yourself extra rest, sleep, and relaxation.
- Expect the healing process will be hard and will take time.
- If possible, keep regular schedules and routines.
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Stage 2: Anger and Depression

- Feelings of pain start to come out.
- Crying and sadness are common.
- Blaming is normal.
- Anger may be directed at those who don't hurt as much as you.
- Thinking can become confused and unfocused.
- Despair may be felt for a short time.

What to do:

- Put off major decisions during this time.
- Be aware of feelings of regret and work toward acceptance.
- Reach out to people you trust. Talk to a counselor if you feel alone.
- Realize that anger is okay. It's what you do with it that matters.
- Allow yourself time to mourn.
- Seek help if you have suicidal thoughts.

Stage 3 – Understanding and accepting

- Feel peace with the emotional pain you suffered.
- Accept what has happened.
- Let go of what might have been.
- Allow yourself feelings of hope.
- Find meaning in the crisis.
- Look toward the future.

What to do:

- Develop new coping skills and begin to put your life back together.
- Let go of the guilt, pain and resentment through forgiveness.
- Discover the “new you.”
- Transform the loss into a new opportunity.
- Laugh; it's often a good, strong medicine.

Recognizing and Coping with Sadness After Loss

It's hard to lose someone or something we care about. Grief doesn't follow any rules. We all hurt and heal in our own ways.

And while grieving is unique to each of us, some experiences are common. Understanding grief and learning how to cope may help you with this tough time.

Losses We Grieve

People grieve for many different things, including loss of a:

- Loved one, pet, or beloved public figure.
- Life role, such as a career or parenthood, when children move into adulthood.
- Physical ability, such as hearing or seeing.
- The break-up of a relationship or marriage.
- Home, neighborhood, friends, or phase of life when moving.
- Plans for the future when life changes unexpectedly.
- Possessions
- Beliefs in a person, idea, or cause.

Expressions of grief

Grief is personal. Everyone responds differently to loss. Some people show grief so it can be seen and felt by those around them. Others do not. If you're grieving a loss, you might have some of these reactions:

Physical: Stomachache or headache, pain around the heart area, insomnia, fatigue, dizziness, trembling, teeth grinding, panic attacks. Though they may appear in a time of grief, it's still important to see a doctor to check out any physical symptoms you may have.

Emotional: Shock, disbelief, numbness, anxiety, confusion, frustration, depression, guilt, loneliness, anger, detachment.

Behavioral: Crying, pacing, staring, forgetting things, losing interest, losing focus, daydreaming, obsessing over the loss, worrying about one's own health.

Spiritual: Anger at the world or a higher power, losing faith, finding faith, becoming more thoughtful or philosophical.

Young children and teenagers may also respond by showing: Fear that they caused the situation; concern about their future; hostility; regression, behaving as they did at a younger age.

Providing Support

You can support yourself or someone who is moving through the grief process.

Let emotions come and go. Acknowledge your feelings, and remember they can change suddenly while you grieve. Here are some tips on providing support during the grief process:

- Write down feelings and thoughts daily.
- Let people you trust know what happened.
- Return to familiar routines when you're ready.
- Eat a healthy diet. Even if you're not hungry, eating small, healthy meals throughout the day can boost your energy and help even out your mood.
- Get some exercise. It can help you feel better and improve your sleep.
- Honor the anniversary or birthday of a departed loved one by:
 - Visiting their grave.
 - Volunteering for a cause meaningful to you and that person.
 - Planting a flower or tree.
 - Visiting a favorite place of the loved one.

Seeking Professional Help

Grief can interfere with your ability to care for yourself or your responsibilities. This is the time to reach out to a professional for help.

Please consider calling Jackson's employee assistance program (EAP), Resources for Living, or other mental health services if you are:

- Focusing on what you didn't do or could have done.
- "I should have said I loved..."
- "I should have saved more money."
- Having persistent unresolved feelings.
- Experiencing more or stronger reactions over an extended period of time.
- Feeling hopeless, helpless, or suicidal.
- Increasing your use of alcohol or drugs.
- Loss isn't something you 'get over.' It changes you. But you'll come out on the other side.

Confidential support is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week at:

- **EAP Number:** 787-466-8377
- **Website:** ResourcesforLiving.com
Username: Jackson; Password: Health