

How-to Comfort a Grieving Coworker

Everyone experiences grief differently. When a coworker is grieving the loss of a loved one, the impact to the workplace may be substantial. Office mates share a unique connection; and close colleagues may feel like extended family. Depending on the relationship, there are many appropriate ways to support a grieving coworker.

Understand the Loss

It's helpful to first understand that many kinds of loss can impair a colleague's work performance, including:

- Death of parent, child, family member, friend or colleague
- Infertility, miscarriage or stillbirth
- Death of a pet
- Diagnosis of serious illness

Recognize Grief

Grief is a normal, healthy response to loss that results in physical, emotional, psychological and social reactions. Anger, fear, frustration, loneliness and guilt are all part of the natural grief process.

Grieving people also experience sadness, confusion and isolation. Grief may seem overwhelming and make it challenging to concentrate on work for some time after a loss. Coworkers may be unable to sufficiently process their grief before they must return to their normal work routine.

How-to Help

An important first step to aid a grieving coworker is to provide an environment that is supportive. It is helpful to acknowledge their loss and to support their healing and recovery. Ways to help include:

- Recognize the loss. Distribute a card for office staff to sign. If you share a close relationship, send a personal note or card.
- Contribute to a group offering to show unified support. Gifts of flowers, food or home care are especially appreciated.
- Gather a group of colleagues to make a condolence visit or attend the funeral service.
- Connect personally. A simple sincere expression like, "I'm sorry for your loss," conveys compassion and concern.
- Understand that people grieve differently. Some find work to be a comfort, while others find it challenging or a burden.
- Respect the grieving person's privacy. Honor closed doors and silence in conversation.
- Listen to your colleague's personal grief expressions and stories away from the office, if possible.
- Offer specific help on work-related projects.
- Offer to cook a meal, care for children or pets, or help with shopping or errands.
- Accommodate personal appointments and brief periods away from the office.
- Treat your coworker gracefully and respectfully. Allow them to carry on with life at their own pace.

Encourage Recovery

Provide a supportive, compassionate work environment where a grieving colleague feels cared for and encouraged. This type of environment will help them heal and recover after experiencing a loss.