

Helping A Grieving Workmate

FACT SHEET 7

Grief strikes the workplace in many ways. It may be as a result of the death of a family member, close friend or workmate, a relationship breakdown, an unwanted job change or redundancy, or a serious medical diagnosis. These events and more will strike most workplaces. Here are things to know and ways to help when colleagues are affected.

- **Watch for common grief reactions:** These are normal reactions and could include disbelief, crying, anger, sadness, depression, guilt ... and associated physical reactions such as tiredness, not eating or sleeping, irritability, mood swings, frustration, overreaction with colleagues and generally not feeling well.
- **There can be on-going behaviour change:** The impact of grief can affect a workmate's day-to-day behaviours, attitudes, motivations, energy, relationships with colleagues, productivity and general job performance. It may even make them less attentive and more accident-prone. In some cases these reactions can impact in ways that affect career opportunities and workplace relationships. Often these behaviours disappear with time. If they don't then medical advice or counselling may be needed to help.
- **Try talking about what happened:** Often colleagues don't know what to say so they say nothing—or worse, avoid the person and ignore the loss. This can isolate the workmate and make it harder to adjust. Try finding time for a coffee or some activity together like a round of golf. This can be the ideal time to ask how they're doing and how things are going at home. Then just listen. No advice is necessary!
- **Consider workplace adjustments:** These may be temporary or permanent. For example, if the person has lost a partner and now has to care for children alone, changes to starting and finishing times might be needed until new childcare arrangements are made. Shift changes, overtime and additional responsibilities may need to be reviewed. Don't make changes without first consulting the employee. The aim is to assist them to adapt to the new situation — not to impose more stress, embarrassment or pressure on them even if it is well intended.
- **What about death or a serious accident in the workplace:** When these events happen they usually impact on many colleagues who work with or know those affected. For serious workplace accidents the company can be expected to use an *Employee Assistance Service* to provide immediate trauma counselling for those affected and ongoing counselling and other support. These services are usually very effective in helping to normalize employees' grief reactions and reduce the personal anxiety of those affected.



© Doris Zagdanski 2012
All rights reserved.

This Fact Sheet is written and produced by Doris Zagdanski.

Doris is an Australian author, educator and speaker on the subject of grief. All her books are available for purchase at: www.allaboutgrief.com

For more information visit: www.allaboutgrief.com