



Understanding Grief: When a Co-worker and Friend Dies

Emotional Aspects of Grief

Grief, with its many peaks and valleys, lasts far longer than society recognizes. When your co-worker, friend, or family member dies, grief is not over in a week, a month, or even a year. Expectations others may have of you should not be a guideline for your own progress. Be patient with yourself. You've been through a lot.

Because each person's grief is different, don't expect that you or those around you will travel this journey at the same speed or in the same way. Be tolerant of the different approaches your co-workers and friends may take.

Some of the common emotions experienced during grief:

- Guilt, real or imagined, is normal. The feeling that if only something had been different, the deceased might have lived, is common. By learning to express and share this feeling with others, eventually you may forgive yourself, understanding that no one can foresee the future.
- Despair and loneliness are common. Even when you are with a group of people, you may feel alone. Few people can understand how deeply the loss of a co-worker or friend hurts unless they have been there.
- Anger often emerges, sometimes aimed at a person imagined to have caused the death, at others who cannot understand your feelings, at a higher power, even at the very person who died.
- A wish to join the friend or loved one who died is natural.

Physical Aspects of Grief

The emotional loss of grief often manifests itself in physical ways. You may sleep for only a few hours, if at all, each night. Feeling tired, walking in a fog, long or short-term memory loss, and an inability to concentrate are not uncommon. Sleep deprivation and the extreme stress of the situation often lead to the feeling that you are "losing it," but this is a normal psychological reaction.

At this time, a balanced diet, rest, and moderate exercise are especially important. Crying also has been proven to have a healing effect, and should not be stifled because of societal views.



It is especially important to avoid the use of drugs and alcohol in hopes of making the pain go away. Prescription medication should be taken sparingly and only under the supervision of a physician. Many substances are addictive and may lead to a chemical dependence that stops or delays the necessary grieving process.

How Can I Face the Future?

Many people feel they have nothing to live for after the death of a friend or loved one and thus think about a release from the intense pain. These feelings are not uncommon, but be assured that a sense of purpose and meaning does return. The pain does lessen.

Support is necessary to work through this time while you are finding the new "you" and work dynamics are changing.

Reexamining priorities and even questioning belief structures is not abnormal. See what you can do about arranging additional time off from work if needed. Plan ahead how you will handle special days such as anniversary dates and holidays. Often the day is easier than the dread that often leads up to it.

While professional help may be needed, many turn to friends, loved ones, and support groups, finding hope and comfort through sharing their story with others, and being able to speak the deceased name without fear of others turning away when the tears do come. Sharing eases loneliness and allows expression of grief in an atmosphere of acceptance and understanding.

Every person will have to find his or her own road through grief. But you will survive. You need not walk alone.

Source: The Compassionate Friends (compassionatefriends.org)

Resources Are Available

Additional information, self-help tools and other resources are available online at www.MagellanAscend.com. You can also call us for more information, help and support. Providers are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week to provide confidential assistance at no cost to you.



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