

Caring for a workmate in their grief

Grief is normal, natural and extremely painful. A person's grief may be due to death, marital breakdown, terminal illness, or any experience that causes that person pain.

Sudden death violates our sense of what is right or normal. Death from an illness that is known assists to prepare us for what is to come. But even if we have some forewarning, the death of a loved one still comes as a shock.

A bereaved person's behaviour, attitude and health can possibly be affected.

Grief is a natural process and some of the emotions displayed may be shock, disbelief, intense loneliness, sadness, depression, guilt, resentment, anger and pre-occupation with the loss. Physical symptoms can be of distress, headaches, backaches, asthma, stomach upset, unable to cope with normal activities, anxiety about the future. It is difficult to believe that they will ever feel good about life again. Sleeping and eating patterns may change.

Many bereaved people have difficulty concentrating, may be overwhelmed by small tasks, impatient with small talk, lack energy, tend to withdraw and experience highs and lows. Their job performance will possibly be affected and relationships may change towards workmates. Stress can make them more accident prone.

Society gives permission to women to be more emotionally honest than men. Unfortunately, men often think that they must 'be strong' and for this reason they may hold their feelings in. Fear of criticism, rejection and appearing weak may cause them not to reach out for help. They may try to 'tough it out'.



This information has been kindly supplied by **HARRISON FUNERALS**.

Harrison Funerals publishes a range of brochures about grief. These brochures and other help is available through contacting them on 8447 1255 or 8265 6060, website www.harrisonfunerals.com.au or email info@harrisonfunerals.com.au

How can you help?

- Encourage them to talk.
- Don't ignore their loss because you feel inadequate.
- Forget the 'cliches' - "You'll get over it", "Don't think about it, there is still so much living left for you", "It's happened, you can't change it".
- Mention the deceased person's name.
- Give permission that tears are okay.
- An arm around the shoulder can say 'I care'.
- Be patient. Realise that mourning the loss of a loved one takes time.
- Be sensitive. Your being there will help.
- Be comfortable with silence.
- Be non-judgmental.
- Reassure them that they don't have to justify their feelings.
- Recognise that they need a caring environment at home and in the workplace.
- Let them grieve at their pace. Don't compare them with others.

It may take months or years of 'ups' and 'downs' before readjustment to the changes from their loss begins.

They may need to tell their story often, don't put them off, this is part of the healing process.

Loss of confidence and self esteem is often an area for the bereaved to deal with. Patience and encouragement will assist them.

Sometimes the bereaved person may throw themselves into work. They may work lots of overtime in an effort to avoid the emptiness at home or family conflict and pressures.

Encourage them to avoid major changes during the first twelve months eg selling the house, changing jobs, etc. To avoid painful memories they may look for temporary relief. They may begin to drink more, smoke or take drugs and also try to avoid responsibilities that have to be faced.

Death of a spouse brings new adjustments and responsibilities, such as rearing children alone or housekeeping. (This also applies to separation or divorce). Offer practical help. Perhaps suggest home help or family day care services supplied by local councils. Sometimes special consideration may need to be given regarding time off to attend to household, school and family matters that occur during working hours.

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Listed below are some resources that will further assist you.

Books

Stuck for Words by Doris Zagdanski
(Hill of Content 1994)

Healing A Friend's Grieving Heart: 100 Practical Ideas for helping someone you love through loss by Alan Wolfelt PhD (Companion Press 2001)

When Men Grieve: Why men grieve differently and how you can help by Elizabeth Levang (Fairview Press 1998)

Men and Grief by Carol Stauracher
(New Herbinger Publications Inc 1991)

Website

www.grieflink.asn.au

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