



Risk Rewarded



Hardhat Health Safety Brief

Responding to Grief in Our Lives

Note: Please maintain proper “physical distancing” of six feet or greater in accordance with the CDC Social Distancing guidelines, while discussing this mental health safety and wellbeing topic.

What is Grief?

Grief is a normal emotional response. We feel grief when someone that we love or care about is taken away from us like an extended illness or death of a family member, friend, neighbor, or pet. We can feel grief when we lose things, too, like our belongings in a house fire or we miss our old home and neighborhood when we move away. Grief can also be a normal response to emotional experiences both at home and in the workplace or jobsite. For example, serious or catastrophic incidents can lead to a wide range of emotions affect the wellbeing of those directly involved in or who witnessed the incident.

Different Ways People Grieve

Grief is a personal response. Each of us reacts and responds to grief differently. These differences are normal. The differences in how grief is expressed is mostly based on differing personalities of people. The way we respond to grief is influenced whether we have previously experienced loss in the past and by the way grieving was modeled for us by others when they experienced loss. In the past, many of us were taught that the grieving process involved certain stages or phases, but that has been found to not really be the case.

Sometimes the expressions are grief can vary widely. Here are a few different ways grief can be expressed:

- Some people experience grief with sadness and tears while others deal with grief with humor or sarcasm.
- Some people get quiet and want to be left alone while others get restless and feel loneliness unless they are with others while grieving.
- Some people may feel guilty and blame themselves while others may feel angry and hostility.

Tips to Boost Resiliency and Counter Grief in the Aftermath of a Serious Workplace Incident

- Drink plenty of water to stay hydrated and flush excess stress hormones from your body. These are the ones like adrenaline that help our body prepare for “flight or fight” responses.
- Limit caffeine and avoid alcohol and sugary energy drinks.
- Stay connected and socialize. Do not isolate yourself.

- Eat – even if you’re not hungry. Staying nourished will help promote better rest and recovery.
- Try to maintain a normal sleep pattern. Take power naps as needed.
- Maintain physical activity and exercise patterns. Being physically active is good for your mental well-being.
- If needed, access help from your company’s EAP or behavioral health services (part of your health insurance benefits). Your employer or union may offer Critical Incident Response counseling services to you, the crew or for the company.

Source: Leading a Company in the aftermath of a Suicide Loss (CFMA’s Building Profits; Nov/Dec 2019).

How to Help Someone Who is Experiencing Grief Due to a Loss

The most important thing to do is to listen. The second most important thing is to respond with compassion, concern and kindness. It is acceptable to acknowledge their loss and express your sympathy and condolences if the loss is a death. It is important to not minimize their sense of loss or tell them that their loss is not so bad or that it is a blessing in disguise.

Grief experts suggest not saying “if you need anything, let me know.” The grieving person may not know what they need at that time and they’re too grief-stricken to tell you so. Instead, experts say the best thing to do for someone who is grieving is to be present for the person(s) experiencing grief.

Ideally, this would be in person with the person(s). However, during COVID-19 this has not been the case due to physical distancing. So, the next best thing is expressing that you “are here” for the person(s). This means that you are available to support them during their time of grief. There are ways you can demonstrate your availability, including: texting, emailing, phoning, or sending a sympathy card.

During COVID-19 it is hard to recommend dropping of a care package or a meal, but you could let the grieving person(s) know you’re willing to do so by leaving it on their doorstep or calling in a pre-paid carryout or home-delivered restaurant meal order to show you care. Another thing that has great value is offering to help the grieving person(s) with routine household tasks like grocery shopping, running errands, or even moving the lawn or weeding the vegetable and flower gardens.

Source: Dr. Camille Wortman; Emeritus Professor of Psychology; University of Stony Brook; interview in Inverse.com; June 7, 2020.

Helping Someone Who is Experiencing Extreme Grief Due to a Loss

Sometimes for some people in some circumstances, grief becomes extreme and does not get better over time. Dealing with or handling grief gets more complicated when a person is dealing with multiple grief layers at once, including a death of a loved one compounded by an illness of

their own, job loss or existing financial stress, or an existing mental health condition. Sometimes this grief leads to isolation, depression and hopelessness. It is important to consider if the person is at risk of self-harm or substance misuse that could turn to an accidental or intentional overdose or suicide.

In these circumstances letting the person you are concerned about their wellbeing is even more important. It is important to share information with them about 24/7-365 crisis hotlines, including the following services:

1. **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:** 800/273-8255
2. **Crisis Text Line:** Text HELP or CONNECT to 741-741
3. **SAMHSA National Helpline:** 800-662-4357 (help with substance use disorders)
4. **SAMHSA Distress Hotline:** 800/985-5990 (emotional distress related to any natural or human-causes disaster).

In major and extreme cases, calling other family members or friends is appropriate to check-in. If you are concerned about the person's life being at risk, call 911 to active emergency services is advisable.

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