

SUPPORTING COLLEAGUES IN GRIEF



Often, when a co-worker returns to work after the death of a loved one, we don't know what to say—so we don't say anything. But staying silent can make the grieving co-worker feel isolated. Below are some do's and don'ts to show your colleague you care.

Appropriate ways to engage with a grieving colleague.

Show empathy.

"I'm glad you are back, and we're here for you."

"We can't change what happened, but if there is anything we can do to make your life easier, know that we are all here for you."

Acknowledge that grief is ongoing.

"How are you today?" is better than "How are you?" Grant says, because it allows people to answer honestly beyond just responding, "I'm fine."

Show up with a specific offer.

But make it clear that it's OK if the person wants to decline.

"I'm in the lobby if you want to talk. I will be here for the next hour whether you come down or not."

Take your cues from the griever.

"I'd love to hear more about your loved one whenever that might be convenient for you. I want to respect your privacy."

Inappropriate ways to engage with a grieving colleague.

Dismiss grief.

"You're going to be fine."

"Time heals everything."

Try to shorten the grief process.

"You're still young, so you can still have another child, get married again, etc."

Rationalize loss.

"He/She is in a better place."

"Everything happens for a reason."



Celebrating Life Every Day

Serving the Community for Over 25 Years



HOW TO HELP ME IN MY GRIEF

A reference to support those who have lost a loved one



Speak to me of the obvious

I know it's painful to talk with me about my grief but I less alone when I know others remember. Please, above all else, don't avoid me. I need to know you care. When you are silent about my grief, I feel more isolated, and I'm tempted to believe you have forgotten. It's okay to use the name of the one who has died and speak of what has happened.

I need your warm caring more than "right words"

It's awkward for me to hear you hunt for profound words. I'm hungry to hear, "I've been thinking of you," "I'm here," "You're in my heart." "I'll call you again tomorrow (or in a few days or next week)." I find it hard to answer the questions repeatedly "How are you?" I am grieving and that means I generally feel lousy. Tell me you care. It is easier for me to hear you than to find a quick answer about me.

I know my sadness will last longer than either you or I want it to be

I know it's painful to talk with me about my grief but I less alone when I know others remember. Please, above all else, don't avoid me. I need to know you care. When you are silent about my grief, I feel more isolated, and I'm tempted to believe you have forgotten. It's okay to use the name of the one who has died and speak of what has happened.

Please let go of trying to fix my pain

I'm likely to be on overload with advice and suggestions. Be patient with me if I can't concentrate enough to read books you bring me. When others try to tell me why this tragedy happened, what I should do or what I should feel, I wonder if it isn't their own sense of helplessness they are trying to quiet. Ask me what I need and if I don't know let me know that is okay. I know I am not much fun right now and I need to know it is okay to be sad and I will gradually find my way through the pain.

Offer to help with practical things

Sometimes ordinary things are a huge help. Maybe you can offer to come eat with me. Ask me if I need help with getting things accomplished whether they be individual administrative asks or public events. If I say I don't need help – be bold to ask me that again in the future.

Please remember we all grieve differently

I may be clumsy as I struggle to know how to grieve and heal. I may be self-absorbed at times, sometimes insensitive, others overly sensitive. I may need to talk, or I may need private time. I may worry you by showing my grief or worry you for not showing my grief and I am grieving, even though it may look different.

If you are worried – talk to me directly

I know I may not be myself for a while. If you get worried about if I am doing things that make my healing harder, if you hear me making decisions that aren't very smart, care for me enough to talk about it. I will do my best to consider your thoughts and ask you do your best to consider I am doing what I can to grieve in a healthy way.

Thank you for your care and support

I am told the journey through grief is a long one. I may get scared or lost at times. With family and friends solidly there for me I know I can inch my way through this tunnel. Stay near me until I can see light again with my own eyes. Your love and caring means more than I can convey in words.