



Time to heal

Dealing with the death of a coworker from COVID-19

The death of a coworker can be a devastating and painful experience. You may be surprised at your sorrow. However, keep in mind that you may have spent more time with this person than with many of your relatives. This person was part of your “work family.” It helps to acknowledge the grief you feel over this loss.

When someone dies from COVID-19, you might feel complex emotions. It can bring up feelings of guilt or anger at the person, others, life or the medical profession. It’s not unusual to question aspects of your life or relationships. You will adjust to this loss and these reactions will decrease over time.

What you might feel:

- **Denial:** It’s difficult to accept the death of someone you were close to or saw every day. Disbelief, numbness and shock are often part of the initial reaction.
- **Anger:** Your sense of loss may cause you to lash out at others or feel anger toward yourself, especially if you didn’t get closure with your coworker.
- **Bargaining:** You may have flashes of memories of your coworker. If the memories are unpleasant, you may feel regret and find yourself making “if only...” statements.
- **Depression:** You may feel sad and lonely. You may feel a loss of energy or enthusiasm for your job.
- **Acceptance:** You find a way to accept the reality of the loss and adapt to current circumstances.

What you need to know:

- **You may have some of the feelings described or none at all.** Although these feelings typically occur in stages, you may go back and forth between stages. You may also experience more than one of these emotions at the same time.
- **There is no “right” or “wrong” way to grieve.** Your reactions are determined by many factors. The circumstances surrounding the death, cultural values, religious beliefs, life experiences and traditions all may affect your experience of grief. It’s not unusual for people to be reminded of earlier losses as they grieve.
- **Some people describe grief as “drowning” in sadness or feeling a “flood” of emotions.** How much and how long someone feels this varies. But, these feelings are a normal part of the grief process.
- **Grieving is difficult.** It can be helpful to remember that others have gone through it before you and have grown from the experience.
- **Focus on healing.** Grief takes time and energy. And it’s a process. Give yourself grace while you heal.

Tips for coping with grief

- **Take your time.** Don’t judge or measure your reactions by those of others.
- **Find a way to honor your coworker.** You may have gone to a funeral or memorial service in the past. But that’s not possible now. Find other ways to honor your coworker. You can donate to his or her favorite charity, arrange a food chain for the family or collect favorite memories to share.
- **Talk.** Share feelings about this loss with friends and family who love and support you.

- **Pay attention to your body’s needs.** Try to exercise as much as you have been, eat healthy meals and get enough rest. Taking good care of yourself helps you to manage the task of grieving.
- **You may be caught off guard by sad feelings.** This is healthy and normal. Be patient as this will lessen over time.
- **Allow time to grieve, but also give yourself breaks from the grieving process.** You might want to try taking 15 minutes a day when you immerse yourself in your grieving experience. Once the 15 minutes are up, it will be time to focus your attention on other things.
- **If you follow a religion, get support through its practice.** Seek out faith mentors. Make time for quiet meditation.
- **Avoid alcohol and other mind-altering substances.** They can make healing a challenge.

Resources

Friends and family members are important resources in helping you cope with the pain of bereavement. And don’t forget: We’re always here for you. You can call us for in-the-moment support, information, resources and televideo or phone counselors for you and your family members.

Confidential services are available
24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

The EAP is administered by Resources For Living, LLC.

All EAP calls are confidential, except as required by law. Information is not a substitute for diagnosis or treatment by a professional. Contact a professional with any questions about specific needs. EAP instructors, educators and participating providers are independent contractors and are not agents of Resources For Living. Provider participation may change without notice.