

No one is ever fully prepared for the death of a valued co-worker. Even if the person was sick for a long time, you may feel guilty that you couldn't prevent the death. Or you may wonder how your office can continue to function without someone who was such an important or well-liked member of the team. How can you cope with your own grief and help others during a difficult time? The key to dealing with a co-worker's long illness or death is to allow yourself to grieve -- and show that you care -- without becoming so overwhelmed by sadness that you neglect your other responsibilities.

## **Coping with loss and grief at work - When a co-worker dies**

Many people spend more time with their co-workers than with some of their family members, and miss a co-worker who died as much as they would miss a close relative. It's important to:

- ***Let yourself grieve.*** In the days and weeks following the death of a co-worker, you may have trouble eating, sleeping, or concentrating. Or you may become tearful, tired, or irritable more easily than usual. These symptoms usually fade as you adjust to life without a co-worker.
- ***Remember that everybody grieves in a different way.*** Your response to a death may be very different from that of the people around you. Allow your co-workers to grieve in their own way -- especially if they didn't know the person as well as you did. And try not to make judgments about how they "should" or "shouldn't" be feeling.
- ***Don't neglect your own work.*** No matter how sad you feel, it's important not to neglect your own work. If you're having trouble concentrating, talk to someone who may be able to give you ideas on how to cope -- HelpPeople, your boss, a therapist, or a trusted friend.
- ***Talk to your co-workers.*** If you feel very sad, talk about your emotions with other people who knew the person who has died. If you try to act as though nothing has changed, your feelings may stay buried and return at inappropriate times or in harmful ways. You might get together with several co-workers and talk about how you can help your co-worker who is ill (or his family). It might help to go for a long walk on your lunch hour with someone who understands what you're feeling.
- ***Find a permanent way to remember your co-worker.*** Put together a book of memories to give to your co-worker's family (and be sure to find out if any of your co-workers have photos that you might want to copy *for* the book). Have a fundraiser or take up a collection *for* a cause the person supported.
- ***Watch for trouble signs.*** But if you're feeling overwhelmed, or find that you're taking the loss much harder than other people, consider talking to a counselor or another professional who can help you sort through your confusing emotions.