



The Compassionate Friends

Offering friendship and understanding to bereaved parents

WHEN A CO-WORKER IS GRIEVING

A child has died. There are no words to make that alright. But there are some things you can do to be supportive. You are taking the first step in caring by reading this.

It is important to know that grief is a normal, healthy response to loss. It is a physical, emotional, spiritual and psychological reaction. Anger, fear, frustration, sadness, loneliness, guilt and despair are all part of the grief process.

Understand that grief is neither a sign of weakness nor a lack of faith. Actively grieving people experience pain, confusion, lack of concentration and isolation.

Those surrounding them often express frustration and a sense of helplessness which may, in time, turn to annoyance if the grieving "takes too long". Yet, the disorientation of grief lasts far longer than our society recognizes.

HOW CAN I HELP AT THE TIME OF DEATH?

- Contact other co-workers to let them know the situation,
- Attend the funeral or call on your co-worker to extend personal condolences.
- Offer to help by doing something specific such as driving, making telephone calls, and running errands.
- Do not be afraid of tears.

"Why do they always turn away when tears come?" (Manager)

- Be sensitive to the fact that people grieve differently. Some may find great comfort in their work, while others may view it as an extra burden.
- Offer to share the person's workload, if you can. Sometimes the smallest gesture lightens the load.

WHAT CAN I SAY?

There are no magic words to take away the pain "I'm so sorry" will express your feelings honestly, while a hug or a touch will give comfort.

"A co-worker touched my aching heart when she shared her memories of my child at company picnics." (Secretary)

- Mention the name of the child who has died and listen as your co-worker talks.
- Avoid saying, "I know how you feel". It is very difficult to comprehend the depth of the loss when a child dies.
- "It was God's will" and other clichés minimize the death and may not be helpful.
- Don't try to state something positive about the child's death, such as, "At least you have other children", "At least he didn't suffer", or "You can always have another baby"

WHAT CAN I DO AT WORK?

- LISTEN: let your co-worker express the anger, pain, disbelief or guilt that may be

there. Bereaved parents often have a need to talk about their child and the circumstances of the death over and over again.

- Avoid judgments of any kind.
- BE THERE: Do not wait for your co-worker to ask for help. There are many tasks that need to be done when a child dies. Offer to accompany your co-worker during some of these tasks, perhaps on your lunch hour or before or after work.

"Someone met me at work to buy my son's car. How I wished one of the guys had been with me as the car pulled away." (Construction Worker)

- Remember your co-worker on important days such as holidays or the child's birthday or death anniversary. Send a card, call or visit. Let the person know that you remember, too.
- Be patient. Grief can last many months. It can also resurface unexpectedly!
- Be responsive to the changes a bereaved parent experiences. While learning to live without the child, the co-worker will adopt new behaviours and roles. Don't expect him to be unchanged by this experience.
- Refer a grieving parent to The Compassionate Friends. There are bereaved parents in each chapter ready to offer support, friendship and understanding.
- Break the isolation that often surrounds the bereaved by encouraging others to maintain contact with the grieving parent.
- Continue *your* contact. Stay in touch by inviting your co-worker to lunch or coffee.

All the parents involved in The Compassionate Friends would like to thank you for caring enough to want to help your co-worker. Your concern makes YOU a "compassionate friend". The Compassionate Friends has also published "When An Employee Is Grieving" and many other brochures which you may find helpful.

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