



# The Compassionate Friends

Offering friendship and understanding to bereaved parents

## WHEN AN EMPLOYEE IS GRIEVING

Most people will have the emotional stress of grief following the death of a family member. However, the death of a child is perhaps the most devastating loss a parent may experience.

Grief is a natural and normal reaction to loss of any kind. It is a physical, emotional, spiritual and psychological response. Grief is a complex process, guided by our past experience, religious beliefs, socio-economic situation, physical health and the cause of the loss. Love, anger, fear, frustration, loneliness and guilt are all a part of grief.

It is important to understand that grief is neither a sign of weakness nor a lack of faith. Living through grief is never easy. Those who are actively grieving are caught in a web of pain, confusion and isolation. Those surrounding the survivors often express frustration and a sense of helplessness which may, in time, turn to annoyance if the grieving "takes too long". Yet, grief, with its many ups and downs, lasts far longer than our society recognizes.

Research shows that there may be a loss of productivity and rise in accident rates among employees suffering from emotional stress. An employee whose child has died may experience some of the following:

- Difficulty in making decisions
- Inability to concentrate
- Disinterest in job related details
- Frustration and irritability
- Depression and mood swings
- Marital and family problems

## HOW CAN YOU HELP?

There are things you can do to help ease the impact of grief on your employee's job performance. Taking an interested and caring attitude can make a difference to both you and your employee. Flexible personnel policies may be necessary to help the employee through the initial period of adjustment. Be careful in assigning new tasks or responsibilities. If the employee is involved in hazardous work, please consider a temporary adjustment in duties.

Be certain to work with the employee to determine work assignments. Communicate. Do not over-task, but do allow the employee to indicate readiness for additional responsibilities. If there is an employee assistance programme, make sure that it is available to the bereaved parent. Have pamphlets about self- help groups such as The Compassionate Friends available through your personnel or employee assistance office.

Grief is an individual response and varies according to the person and the circumstances. There is no precise time-table for the grief process. During recovery the employee may have varying levels of productivity. However, our experience indicates that on-the-job support enables bereaved parents to recover and become productive employees sooner than those who do not receive support. While resolved grief will lead to a more productive employee, unresolved grief may lead to continuing symptoms.

Helping the grieving parent will be worth your effort. Company morale may be enhanced as other employees observe the way you handle this situation. In addition, your support can create a special bond that may result in a more loyal, dedicated employee.

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