

Healthy Workplace – Tips for Supporting Grieving Employees

Washington State Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

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Discovering and maintaining a healthy balance between the needs of grieving employees and the responsibilities of the workplace are both tricky and essential. Here are some helpful thoughts and suggestions for maintaining that delicate balance.

Grief

- Grief is an important and necessary process, and every person grieves in a unique way.
- Grieving people need understanding, compassion, and time.
- People adjust and adapt to loss but do not “get over” their grief.
- There are no rules for handling grief. Common grief stages have been identified, but the grief process cannot be structured.
- For some, the most painful time is immediately after the death of a loved one, others may find grief becomes harder as time progresses.
- Stories, sometimes told repeatedly, are part of the healing journey.

Grief and Managers

- The manager’s role is not to “manage grief” but to create an environment where work progresses as employees move through their grief.
- Management’s caring support and professionalism sets a beneficial and long-lasting example for the workforce.
- Acknowledge the loss simply. The wrong thing to say is nothing at all
- Avoid comparisons to your own loss. Grief experiences differ with each individual.
- It’s important to stay in touch with employees who must leave or have not yet returned to the workplace.
- Don’t forget to take care of yourself during this critical time.

Regaining Workplace Balance - When a grieving employee returns to work, consider:

- Often grieving employees are too tired, numb or overwhelmed to communicate what they need. Inquire whether an employee has special needs such as privacy, reduced work hours or help to catch up on their workload.
- Ask what information the person does or does not want you to share with others
- Setting appropriate boundaries concerning acceptable time and place to talk
- Remind the person who is grieving of the benefit of the EAP. Offer time from work for a confidential, no-cost EAP appointment.
- A reassuring touch can communicate more than words to those who feel alone, but avoid touching without permission.
- Remember holidays and anniversaries can be especially difficult times for a grieving person.