

More common than an employee death, managers often encounter a situation in which an employee experiences a significant loss in their life. The death of a loved one, a divorce or other life changing event can be a significant loss in your employee's life. As a manager, you need to be aware of the impact loss has on your employee and workplace.



For more information about addressing end-of-life issues in the workplace,
Visit www.caringinfo.org
Call **800.658.8898**
Email liveatwork@nhpco.org

Grief in the Workplace:
When an Employee Suffers a Loss



Caring Connections
a program of the
National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization

© 2007 NHPCO.

Grief in the Workplace: When an Employee Suffers a Loss

Ask the Grieving Employee

Ask what information about the loss they would like communicated and to whom.

Set an Example

Many people are often afraid to say the “wrong thing,” or are so fearful of death that they shy away from someone who has suffered a loss. A personal call or note from you is appropriate to express sympathy, as are office-wide memorial contributions, cards or flowers. It is important to acknowledge the loss and ensure an appropriate company-wide response. Employees notice and appreciate these offerings. They also notice a lack of response and, naturally take that as a lack of care from their employer.

Job Performance and Grief

The initial reaction after a significant loss is often shock and numbness. Mistakes, confusion, and an inability to concentrate are all a part of grief.

A grieving employee will not be fully functional and performance may be below normal standards for weeks or even months after the loss.

What You Can Do

Ask the employee what you can do to help relieve some of the work stress he or she may be feeling.

If performance consistently continues to lag, you have the right – and the obligation, as the manager – to raise your concerns with your employee. Some signals that the person who has suffered a loss may be experiencing difficulties with work responsibilities may include:

- Increased absence.
- Indication that the person is not sleeping or eating.
- Changes in personal habits, i.e. clothing, hygiene, coming to work, going home.
- Inability to work. The person may continue to be distracted, be overly absorbed, preoccupied or make repeated mistakes.
- Change in attitude, a normally calm person may be angry; an aggressive person may suddenly become passive.
- Conflict with staff.

It is important to know that the employee, who has suffered a major loss, yet seems to show no symptoms of grief, may also be experiencing difficulties and need support.

Refer the person to your employee assistance program (EAP), or obtain information from the program. Suggest places that offer help and support outside the work environment. Be prepared to offer counseling resources, information on community resources, and some suggested reading materials to your employee. Many hospice and community organizations offer grief support services. Area hospices work with individuals and families before and after a death, and are experienced in helping with workplace grief issues, regardless if the person was served by hospice. Hospice staff may also be able to come to your workplace to talk about these issues.

Remember, death and loss are hard to discuss – but facing it and the grief it causes will help you and your staff survive these difficult times.

Hospices throughout the country offer grief support to anyone in the community who has had a loss through death, not just for those who were cared for by hospice. Grief professionals who specialize in grief and loss can offer some suggestions or sources of support. They are a resource for those dealing with grief, as well as for those seeking guidance on how to support others who are grieving. To find a hospice in your area or for more information, visit www.caringinfo.org or call **800.658.8898**.