



## Loss of a co-worker

Dealing with the death of a co-worker can be traumatic. Co-workers often become an extended family. Yet when the unthinkable happens, employers and employees alike want to know what to do.

Deaths that are work-related may be especially troubling. These deaths can leave co-workers grieving as well as feeling unsafe.

There truly isn't one correct way to approach the situation. Below are a few helpful tips:

- **Make sure the manager of the deceased employee deals with his or her own grief.** Employees may look to their manager for support and/or direction. It's important that the manager has addressed how he or she is feeling. Managers cannot effectively help others if they don't take care of themselves.
- **Develop a partnership between Human Resources and the manager.** As employees struggle with the loss of a colleague, family members of the deceased may have concerns that need to be addressed. It is important that Human Resources identify a point person to facilitate the interaction with relatives of the deceased. Family members may have questions regarding their loved one's pension plans and overall benefits coverage. Family members should have one point of contact in order to get their needs addressed. This makes it easier for the family and demonstrates sensitivity at such a difficult time.
- **Share information.** When a death occurs, it is important to share factual information of regarding what happened and what plans or arrangements have been. When possible, check with the family about what information they would like shared so their wishes are respected.
- **Develop a customized plan to handle the details.** Questions may arise such as, who will pack up the employee's belongings? To whom should we send the employee's personal things? Every situation is different. No two employees are the same and the situation cannot be handled in the same way. Conversations with a family member will help the manager facilitate this task. To develop a customized plan, contact the family to determine what their wishes are. Ask the family if they would like to pick up their loved one's belongings or should they be mailed or even brought to the house. If the family asks to throw away the employee's belongings, it might be a good idea to set them aside for a while. Family going through the grieving process might regret asking to throw personal belongings out.
- **Plan a memorial.** It may be appropriate to do something at the workplace to commemorate the loss. Find out from co-workers how they would like to honor the deceased, e.g., plant a tree; create a memory book or bulletin board, etc. Make sure everyone has the opportunity to express their opinion.
- **Preserve the team or department and give the family a helpful transition.** Make sure that everyone in the affected department is doing what they need to do in order to return to some sense of normalcy. If the company is having a memorial program, it may be a good idea to invite the family of the deceased co-worker. This can give the family closure in regards to their loved one's place of employment.



Losing a co-worker due to death is never easy, especially when it is unexpected. However, when co-workers, the family, and management coordinate in a joint effort, the transition can be smooth and become a positive experience. Remember to be patient and that everyone grieves differently. Time can truly heal a loss.

### **Resources Are Available**

Additional information, self-help tools and other resources are available online at [www.MagellanHealth.com/member](http://www.MagellanHealth.com/member). Or call us for more information, help and support. Counselors are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week to provide confidential assistance at no cost to you.