

# Grief at work



Most people spend a third of their lives at work and co-workers can become like family. When a co-worker passes away, there is a life-altering injury at work, or someone in the workplace is grieving, it can impact the workplace.

Grief symptoms can affect a person's safety and well-being as well as lead to increased risk for making mistakes, errors in judgment, illnesses, or injuries. These symptoms may also result in damaged product, poor quality issues, decreased morale, and damaged workplace culture.

## Grief symptoms

- Anxiety
- Fear
- Guilt
- Increased tension
- Poor concentration
- Difficulty making decisions
- Restlessness
- Changes in appetite
- Difficulty sleeping/fatigue
- Headaches
- Lack of motivation
- Confusion or forgetfulness
- Worry about situations outside of work
- Withdrawal from social situations

## How grief shows up in the workplace

- Employee makes unusual mistakes or makes more mistakes than normal
- Employee communicates less than normal
- Employee starts missing meetings and deadlines and is late for work or misses work regularly
- Employee is more irritable or emotional
- Employee becomes careless about decisions, quality, and safety
- Employee falls asleep during work or breaks
- Employee is forgetful and can't remember recent conversations
- Employee becomes antisocial

The stages of grief are:



shock



denial



anger



bargaining



depression



acceptance

We can help ourselves and our co-workers with grief by recognizing and accepting what's occurred and then offering support. Workers who feel cared for are more likely to experience improved recovery. Colleagues and employers don't need to be experts in bereavement or grief counseling. However, it is good practice, especially at a management level, to have some understanding of the impact of grief and how to respond appropriately.

### Understanding the stages of grief

Grief can come in many forms and cause an array of powerful emotions. Since we all grieve in our own way, we may not go through all the stages **listed in the sidebar**, or we may go through them in a different order.

### Workplace support

- Have a plan for serious workplace incidents or fatalities. The plan could include inviting a provider to come onsite to help employees, having referral information ready to share, and providing supervisors with support.
- Call an informal meeting. Give permission to staff to talk about their feelings and loss.
- Talk about grief and mental well-being in meetings with co-workers.
- Move job duties as needed to ensure employees are not given duties or projects they can't mentally handle.
- Provide grief resources to your staff.

Include resources such as employee assistance program (EAP) information, community mental health and behavioral health providers, private therapists, and faith-based organizations.

### Resources

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) National Helpline, 1-800-662-HELP (4357) is a confidential, free, 24-hour-a-day, 365-days-a-year, information service, in English and Spanish. This service provides referrals to local treatment facilities, support groups, and community-based organizations. Callers can also order free publications and other information. Also visit the online treatment locator ([findtreatment.samhsa.gov](https://findtreatment.samhsa.gov)).

[HealGrief.org](https://healgrief.org) offers many local and national bereavement support resources, such as online publications, local workshops, and camps.