



## IAM Air Transport District 142

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# When a Colleague Dies

People who work together are like extended families. When a person dies, friends and co-workers grieve. When the death is unexpected, as from violence or an accident, it can be particularly traumatic.

### *The Grieving Process:*

Grieving is a process that can take weeks, months, and even a few years. People don't heal on a timetable. The brief time given to attend the funeral only touches the beginning stage of the process. Experts describe the stages of grief in various ways, but broadly speaking they include:

- **Shock and Denial:** a numbness and disbelief that the event has occurred. There may be physical reactions, such as feeling faint or nauseous.

To help yourself: surround yourself with friends and family for support. Being around people who care about you can help ease the pain.

- **Anger:** at the deceased, at doctors, co-workers, etc. There may be feelings of abandonment because the person left so suddenly. There may be frustration because others don't know what the loss means.

To help yourself: appropriately express negative emotions in order to work through your feelings.

- **Guilt:** about things not done or said.

To help yourself: recognize guilt as a normal phase of grieving, but try not to put it behind you. Focus on the positive aspects of the relationship you had.

- **Depression:** about a loss that feels overwhelming and sadness that seems never-ending. There may be a real sense of loneliness.

To help yourself: realize that experiencing a certain amount of depression is healthy. Feeling depressed is one of the first signs that you've begun the healing process.

- **Acceptance:** of the situation and life's new reality.

- **Growth:** readiness to move ahead with one's life.

Some people experience the grieving process in this order. Most often, a person feels several of these emotions at the same time, perhaps in different degrees. Eventually, each phase is completed and the person moves ahead. The extent, depth, and duration of the process will also depend on how close people were to the deceased, the circumstances of the death, and their own situation.

### ***Take the Time to Grieve:***

You and your co-workers will need time to grieve. Some things to do:

- Create a memorial board. A photo, card, or special item the person kept on his/her desk can be a way to remember.
- Hold or participate in a fund-raiser for a special cause or for the family of the deceased.
- Create a book of memories to give to the family. Many people are not aware of the work-life of the people they love. These will be unique memories for the family and a way for you to privately express feelings and memories.
- Conduct a workplace-only event. A luncheon or a work-only memorial is a chance for co-workers to acknowledge their unique relationship with the deceased.

### ***What to Expect:***

- People experience grief differently. You, or a co-worker who was particularly close to the person who died, may feel depressed, absent-minded, short tempered, or exhausted. These are all normal feelings.
- Creating healthy memories is part of healing. Some people find talking about the deceased helps them manage their grief. Others keep to themselves. Respect the fact that others may feel the loss more or less strongly than you, or cope differently.
- A death generates questions and fears about our own mortality. If a co-worker dies, you may feel guilty or angry at the person, at life, or at the medical profession. It may cause you to question your own life. These are normal emotions.
- Be aware of how you react to a deceased co-worker's replacement. Your anger or disappointment at his/her performance, personality or work style may be less a function of the individual than your grief about the person they are replacing.
- Get help if you have trouble coping with the loss of your co-worker or if you find that your work is suffering. A lag in your performance or problems with attendance could be a signal that this loss is affecting you more profoundly than you thought.

**Source: The Hospice Council of Metropolitan Washington and Magellan Behavioral Health Wellness Tips**

### ***Encouraged by:***

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