

# Coping with the loss of a co-worker

People who work together are connected by being part of the same organization — and many colleagues become friends. When a co-worker passes away, it's normal for people in the workplace to be affected — whether or not they were close to the person. Some may experience shock or grief.

These emotional reactions are natural. They may be felt immediately or can appear hours, days, weeks or months later. Usually these feelings will ease over time. It's equally normal to experience no reaction at all. Sometimes the loss can feel so painful that it interferes with someone's ability to work or function at home.



## Common reactions to grief?

The loss of a co-worker may produce a wide range of symptoms that may feel unusual to you. Remember that these are normal reactions, and while they are different for each person, they may affect:

### How you think

- Poor concentration
- Shorter attention span
- Slowed problem solving
- Memory problems
- Difficulty making decisions

### How you feel physically

- Headaches
- Chest or stomach pain
- Muscle tremors
- Difficulty breathing
- Elevated blood pressure

### How you feel emotionally

- Depression
- Grief
- Guilt
- Anxiety or fear
- Feeling lost or overwhelmed

### How you behave

- Excessive silence
- Social withdrawal
- Changes in sleep and eating habits
- Lower work performance



## How to help yourself

Acknowledge the death and your reactions to it. Give yourself permission to feel badly without labeling yourself. Attend the funeral or memorial service. Take time to grieve.

- Get plenty of rest.
- Stick with everyday routines. Familiar habits can be very comforting.
- Eat well-balanced and regular meals, even if they don't seem appealing.
- Talk to someone who will listen and allow you to experience your feelings. If you don't feel like talking, just being with a companion can help ease your grief.
- Don't try to "numb the pain" with drugs or alcohol.
- Realize that recurring thoughts and feelings associated with the death are normal. They'll decrease over time and become less painful.
- Remember it's OK to ask for help if you're having trouble coping. Contact your Emotional Wellbeing Solutions or a support group.



There are a variety of resources available to yourself and loved ones at [optumwellbeing.com](https://optumwellbeing.com)

Our Critical Support Center offers emotional support resources and information when you need it most. Find a variety of topic areas including mental health, traumatic events, natural disasters, grief and loss, supporting adolescents in crisis, and more.



## How to help your colleagues

Remember that, just like you, your co-workers are affected by the death. People experience grief differently. There is no right or wrong way to grieve.

Spend time with co-workers. Share feelings and check on how they're doing. Allow other people to talk about their feelings. Listen and respect their point of view, even if you don't share it.

Be aware that grief often makes people lash out with anger or other emotions. Don't take these emotional outbursts personally. Suggest available help, such as your Emotional Wellbeing Solutions or a support group. It may take longer for some people than others, but with time and acceptance the pain will lessen.

Your Emotional Wellbeing Solutions benefit offers you and your family confidential assistance to help you deal with a wide range of personal, health or work-related issues. This free service helps you manage stress, overcome anxiety or depression and cope with grief or loss. Our Emotional Wellbeing Specialists are available any time, every day.



### Critical support when you need it

Visit [optumwellbeing.com](https://optumwellbeing.com) for additional critical support resources and information.



### Call for support at

Your Optum benefit offers support from specially trained, mental health specialists to help anyone who is overwhelmed, depressed, or searching for answers.



**This program should not be used for emergency or urgent care needs. In an emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room.** This program is not a substitute for a doctor's or professional's care. Consult with your clinician for specific health care needs, treatment or medication. Due to the potential for a conflict of interest, legal consultation will not be provided on issues that may involve legal action against Optum or its affiliates, or any entity through which the caller is receiving these services directly or indirectly (e.g., employer or health plan). This program and its components may not be available in all states or for all group sizes and is subject to change. Coverage exclusions and limitations may apply.

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