

# TIP SHEET: WHEN A TEAM MEMBER DIES

The people who work with you and for you can be like extended family. Given the number of hours you spend and the effort you invest in achieving goals together, your work interactions create important connections and closeness. That sense of family is even more important during difficult situations, such as the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

When your organization experiences the loss of a coworker, however, it leaves a void for both you and your team. When the death is unexpected, it can be particularly traumatic.

## THE GRIEVING PROCESS

People do not heal on a timetable – feelings and symptoms of grief can take weeks, months and even years to manifest and evolve. The brief time given to attend the funeral, whether in person or through a virtual service, only touches the beginning stages of grief.

Experts describe the feelings, symptoms and outcomes of grief in various ways, including:

- Shock
- Denial
- Anger
- Guilt
- Anxiety
- Sleep disorders
- Exhaustion
- Overwhelming sadness
- Concentration difficulties

Typically, you will feel multiple emotions and experience several symptoms together, though perhaps in different degrees. Over time, emotions do ease and eventually, each phase is completed.

## TAKE TIME TO GRIEVE

You and your team members need time to acknowledge the loss. The extent, depth and duration of the mourning process for each of you will depend on the circumstances of the death, the relationship you had with the deceased and your personal situations, emotional wellbeing and support systems. Some ways to help everyone during grieving include:

- **Share arrangements.** During this time of quarantine and social distancing, many families are hosting virtual visitations and/or services. Provide this information to your team and allow time off for those who wish to participate.
- **Create a book of memories to give to the family.** Many people are not aware of their loved one's work life and relationships. Your unique memories will be meaningful to the family and a way for you to express feelings. Include photos from work-related events and share awards or recognitions.

# TIP SHEET: WHEN A TEAM MEMBER DIES

- **Conduct a workplace-only event.** An office-wide memorial, held virtually now and/or planned at a time in the future when everyone can gather, gives coworkers the opportunity to acknowledge their unique relationship with the deceased.

Each of you will experience grief uniquely. Team members may find talking about the deceased helps them manage their grief. Others will keep to themselves. Encourage everyone to expect and respect individual processes, understanding that for some, feelings of loss may be stronger or linger longer and that coping skills may differ.

Going through the grieving process, struggling with closure and learning to heal after loss is not something that must be done alone. If you or a member of your team are having difficulty, contact your employee/member assistance program for assistance.