

# Loss in the Workplace

Jenn Flaum, LCSW, MBA



How we process change, transition, cope and grief is unique to each person. No two people respond to loss in the same way and there is not a time table for healing. Relationships in the workplace are unique, to some the relationship to the person who has died was a working relationship, to others a deep friendship. When there is a loss in the workplace we are impacted individually, as a team, depending on our role and as an organization, providing us with opportunities to be supported and support one another.

## If you have lost a colleague:

- Attend the funeral
- Create a memorial at home or in your workspace. (Light a candle on your desk, lead a fundraiser, plant a tree, display a picture of your colleague or one of their interests)
- Find a support person at work you can express your feelings too and talk about the person you lost
- Recognize “grief bursts” will happen and have a plan for when they occur at work
- You may have trouble concentrating and remembering information. Ask co-workers to write down, email or text important information
- Do not assume everyone is impacted and if people are not expressing themselves they don't care. We all had a unique relationship and grieve differently

## Supporting a colleague:

- Make contact and check in. Do not assume your coworkers will reach out to you
- Listen with your heart
- Take the time, cancel the meeting or be late to the appointment if someone needs to talk
- Avoid clichés
- Don't be judgmental
- See the person as a person, not a task that needs to be accomplished

### For Supervisors:

- Seek outside support. You, too, have lost a colleague and just because you are in a leadership role does not mean you can, or should, be the source of support for your team
- Adapt employee scheduling to allow time to honor the person who has died. Make it possible for employees to attend the memorial or funeral
- Create an environment that supports taking space, when needed. (Extended talks, short walks, emotions in the workplace, etc)
- If possible do not assign new tasks within two weeks of the loss. When new tasks need to be assigned, be mindful of who you are assigning them too

### For Organizations:

- Remember people are your most important asset and while tasks can be reassigned, how we treat each other and honor those no longer with us creates a feeling of value within the organization, despite having jobs to complete
- Ensure policies are in line with supporting employees (Time off, employee assistance programs, insurance benefits for individual counseling, scheduling, etc.)
- Create space for a permanent memorial (Brick, bench, tree, memory wall or book etc)



720-748-9908

info@heartlightcenter.org

www.heartlightcenter.org