



# Grief in the Workplace

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**Q:** My coworker has just returned to work after the death of his spouse. I don't want to upset him further so should I say anything or leave him alone?

**A:** Death is an uncomfortable subject for most people and knowing the right thing to say is difficult, especially in a workplace setting. Everyone grieves differently. Some use work as a welcome distraction from their emotional turmoil and would rather not discuss the subject. Others are hurt that coworkers act like nothing has changed. The best response depends on the person.

Approach your coworker privately and acknowledge the loss of his spouse. Ask how you can be of support. You might say, "It's good to have you back. I'm sorry for the loss of your wife and I can only imagine how difficult it must be. If you ever want to have a cup of coffee or grab lunch together and just talk, I want you to know I'm always available." Grief has many phases; the pain never goes away but can change and grow less intense over time. There's no timeline for healing, so keep checking in with your coworker and let him tell you what support he needs at the moment.

Avoid giving advice, making judgments, or asking, "How are you?" if you don't intend to listen to the full answer.

Source: Fee, Susan, M.Ed., L.P.C. (March 2006). Difficult conversations: Grief in the Workplace. Communication Tipsheet, March 2006 Edition.

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