

TIP SHEET: SUPPORTING A GRIEVING COLLEAGUE

When a colleague loses someone close, it can be extremely difficult to know how to support and talk with them during their time of grief. Your colleague may experience a range of intense emotions, which may come and go in waves. However, understanding that their reactions are a normal part of grieving can be comforting. Although everyone reacts to loss differently, in this handout are some useful concepts to keep in mind and suggestions people have found helpful when supporting a colleague in the grieving process.

IMPORTANT THINGS TO REMEMBER

- The grieving process does not happen in linear stages. It is different for everyone.
- Your colleague's loss can trigger past or current grief for you and others, especially if their loss is similar to a loss you experienced. Be mindful of this impact on your personal emotions and behaviors.
- You do not have to be a close friend or coworker of your colleague to feel sadness or be impacted by your colleague's loss.
- It may be difficult for your coworker to speak about their loss in the workplace.

TIPS FOR SUPPORTING A COLLEAGUE

- Remember that you can be a source of support for your colleague even if you are not a close friend or family member.
- Try to check in with your coworker outside of the workplace, if possible, as they may be struggling to remain focused on work. Ask them "How are you *today*?"
- It is common to worry that you may say the 'wrong thing' to your colleague. If you are not sure what to say, it's ok to admit it. Offer a listening ear instead.
- Consider how you want to approach your colleague after they return to work and what you would like to say to them.
- Some helpful things to say include "How can I be with you in a way that helps you?" or "I am here for you."
- Consider pooling unused sick time and donating to the bereaved colleague, if your work allows.
- Gather funds for flowers, a donation, or another way of honoring your colleague's loved one.
- If you are comfortable and able, take part in the funeral or memorial services.
- Give a card or letter expressing your sympathy.
- Keep the invitations coming. Continue to ask the colleague out to lunch or to other work gatherings. Even if they are not up for going, they will still appreciate being remembered.