



Leadership Guide to Suicide Postvention

A death by suicide can result in intense feelings of anger, guilt, and sadness, as well as an unanswerable 'why.'

As your employees struggle to understand and accept the loss, as a leader you have the dual responsibility of keeping the workplace functioning, while also leading your team through this difficult time.

It can be helpful to know what kind of reactions you might see from employees, and what you can do to be helpful to them.

COMMON REACTIONS

- Shock and denial
- Anger
- Blaming
- Guilt
- Grief and sadness
- Poor concentration
- Decreased productivity
- Isolation/withdrawal
- Physical reactions

WHAT LEADERSHIP CAN DO

- As soon as possible, hold a meeting and provide factual, honest information about what happened according to the wishes of the deceased's family. Make sure you have the family's permission before sharing the cause of death.
- Express care and concern for employees' ability to work as usual. Acknowledge the impact of what happened and be flexible with how your employees are reacting.
- Allow employees some time to talk with each other and process what happened. If possible, provide a quiet place for them to mourn.
- Consider temporarily reassigning safety sensitive tasks.
- Be visible and check in with employees periodically. Ask how they are doing and listen to them, offering a compassionate response.
- Coordinate with HR regarding assistance for the family, as well as employee attendance at funeral or memorial services.
- Be mindful of anniversaries or significant dates, in which grief may re-emerge. It may be appropriate to acknowledge the loss again.

WHAT TO AVOID

- Don't minimize what happened or employees' reactions - such as "they're in a better place" or "you will get over it."
- Don't use religious references to death or dying.
- Don't make employees talk about how they are feeling. If needed, an avenue for sharing their reactions should be made available, but not required.
- Don't blame yourself or employees for not being able to prevent this.

TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

The death of an employee impacts those in leadership as well. Not only did you lose an employee and someone you cared about, but you have the additional responsibility of keeping the workplace going. In stressful situations like this it is important to take care of yourself, and to allow yourself to grieve the loss as well. Here are some suggestions:

- Eat healthy and drink lots of water - your body and mind need the nutrients to recover from stress and expel the stress chemicals.
- Engage in regular exercise - this helps to boost chemicals that improve mood, reduce stress, and improve sleep.
- Try to maintain your usual sleep routine - if having trouble sleeping, get up and do a relaxing activity for a little while to distract your mind from worries.
- Help someone else - be a support to your coworkers; donate or volunteer at a charity.
- Do some things you enjoy - part of taking care of yourself is making time to relax and have fun; this gives you a break from grieving and helps to maintain balance.
- Talk to someone; family, friends, coworkers, a counselor, faith mentor, or anyone else with whom you feel comfortable sharing your feelings and is helpful to you.
- Maintain your normal routine. This may help you regain your sense of control and predictability of life.
- Think about other times when you have coped with difficult situations. What positive coping strategies worked for you then? Can you practice those now?

WHEN TO SEEK PROFESSIONAL ASSISTANCE

If you or your employees

- Unable to care for yourself or dependents.
- Experience significant impairment in your ability to function at work or in your personal life.
- Feel intense sadness or depression for more than two weeks.
- Have increased use of drugs or alcohol.
- Have thoughts of harming yourself or others.



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