

The Successful SUPERVISOR

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Tips from  LifeSolutions

The death of a co-worker is a painful experience for everyone close to that person. As we discussed in the October issue of The Successful Supervisor, responsibility for supporting the work group generally falls on the shoulders of its direct management team. Managers may feel ill equipped to respond to the grief of their employees and intuitively turn to outside sources, such as the EAP, not only for consultation, but for on-site interventions such as group debriefings and individual grief counseling. While there may be times when on-site interventions are needed, today's best practice does not support this as an automatic response to a workplace death or crisis. So, what is a manager to do? What is a helpful response? This issue will provide recommendations on how to best support your staff in times of grief and sorrow. As always, we appreciate your feedback: E-mail EAP at ask@lifesolutionsforyou.com or contact an EAP account manager at 1.800.647.3327.

Debra Messer MA, CEAP, LifeSolutions

Recovery of individuals and the work group depends largely on the effectiveness of the grief leadership provided by the group's managers and supervisors. In times of distress, employees look to their leaders for guidance, empathy, and support as well as cues on how to react and respond. While it is tempting to call in an outsider or "expert" to support employees, their own leaders are *usually* in the best position to offer the comfort and reassurance staff may need.

Does this mean you need to "go it alone" and should not contact the EAP? Not at all.

Your first step should be to contact the EAP for consultation and support.

EAP can support you by:

- ◆ Talking through the situation and the needs of your staff;
- ◆ Alerting the LifeSolutions National Service Center of potential calls;
- ◆ Assisting you in planning your course of action;
- ◆ Helping you identify any employees needing special attention;
- ◆ Providing needed support materials; and
- ◆ Deciding with you if it would be better to have EAP on-site for support.

While managers are in the best position to comfort and guide employees, LifeSolutions is available as a backup and a resource.

What are some of the other steps management can take to support staff?

- ◆ **Provide a private place** where employees can talk, share memories, cry, or reflect. Let them know that this room is set aside. You may want to offer food and drink throughout the day. Be aware that some staff may need to talk while others may not. Both are normal reactions to loss.
- ◆ **Share information.** Employees are trying to make sense of the loss. There will usually be an intense "need to know." Managers can show concern by making an effort to have and share information in a timely manner. Admitting that you "don't know" is more comforting than not being told anything. You may want to assign someone to be the contact person with the deceased's family. They can help coordinate any support the staff may want to offer the family.
- ◆ **Contact employees who are temporarily away from the office.** Make sure those who are away on leave or vacation are notified so that they can join in the grieving process.
- ◆ **Keep a normal workday routine, but be flexible.** Getting back to work and familiarity facilitates healing, especially if framed as a way to honor the person. (Let's serve our clients the way Sue would have.)

- ◆ **Support informal rituals.** Staff may want to read a poem, put flowers or a picture on a desk, or hold a moment of silence.
- ◆ **Consider holding a memorial service,** particularly if employees are unable to attend the funeral. Make every attempt to accommodate those who do wish to attend services.
- ◆ **Be a role model.** If you can show that you are actively grieving but still able to function effectively, employees will realize that they can also be sad without losing their ability to perform their job duties. Avoid hiding your own feelings, as this may lead your staff to misperceive you as uncaring.
- ◆ **Understand grief.** Expect that your employees may have different reactions to loss and all can be normal (crying, distraction, numbness, anger, stress, or even a desire to "just get back to work").
- ◆ **Remind employees that EAP is available** for anyone who may be experiencing a prolonged reaction or is highly distressed by the situation.

In summary, there *are* times when it is useful to have EAP on-site following a loss. However, in many situations the most helpful response will come from within the work unit itself. Your EAP consultant will be able to help you tailor your response to the needs of your employees.

Stay tuned next month for recommendations on stress management. If you have any questions or if you are currently dealing with a workplace loss, contact us at 1.800.647.3327.

Nothing in this information is a substitute for following your company's policies related to information covered here.