Helping Your Team Recover from the Death of an Associate

Leaders navigate a wide range of situations, challenges and crises. Sadly, this sometimes includes the passing of an associate.

This article will help guide you through best practices in supporting your team after the loss of an associate. Please know that Carelon Wellbeing has a dedicated team of clinicians, the Leader Support Specialists, who can help guide you through next steps, best practices and even onsite counseling support after a loss. Reach out 24/7 at 888-275-0021 | TTY 711, select option #1 after the language prompt.

Grief after a loss

Carelon Wellbeing 888-275-0021 | TTY 711, select option #1 after the language prompt for leader support.

All of us grieve after a personal loss—it's a normal, common experience. Grief is always a process which can include some or all of these responses:

- distress and anger
- guilt
- worry
- depression
- loneliness
- physical signs—fatigue, upset stomach, trouble sleeping, problems focusing

Each person on your team, including yourself, will react to the news and the grieving process in a unique way. There is no "right" or "wrong" response. Let's review some steps you can take during this time.

Communication

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To onsite associates: Quickly breaking the news of the associate's passing is a critical first step. You can call Carelon Wellbeing for help in planning this meeting. This may be the first time you are challenged with such an issue. But, Leader Support Specialists regularly consult about the loss of associates. If you can, hold the meeting in a private room, since such startling news may not sink in right away.

You may need to repeat yourself. Be patient and plan for silences, emotional responses and questions. You may not be able to answer all questions, but being transparent with the information available, will be appreciated. Listen to what your associates say without judgment and with compassion. Share your own feelings as well.

If an associate is distressed or needs in-the-moment support, you can always assist in directly connecting the associate to Carelon Wellbeing for immediate services and support.

To those away from the workplace: Don't forget those who are not there that day or if your team is virtual. Calling them one at a time, if possible, will help each one feel part of the larger team.

To those in the rest of the company: Work with your leader or human resources partner to communicate to the broader associate group of the person's passing.

To the family: Before your first announcement to associates, ask the family members what specific facts about the person's passing can be shared. Also get details about the funeral arrangements. Leaders can remind family of access to Carelon Wellbeing, and directly connect them to these benefits, such as counseling and resources available through work/life services.

Opportunities to grieve

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Funeral/memorial service: If the family has shared service arrangements, ensure that impacted associates are aware of these details.

Other memorial activities: You can request a Home Depot Bereavement Kit for associates to express their condolences and give to the family. To request a kit, click HERE. You can also make a memorial board or book, or plant trees in the person's name. Supporting such actions shows your concern and lets people use their creativity as an outlet to grieve.

Returning to balance

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Loss of an associate often takes a short-term toll on a team and their productivity. Acknowledging the effects of grief and communicating respect and compassion are useful strategies for facilitating the return to productivity. Keeping your door open to associates to talk privately is also helpful. You can't manage away the grief of your team, but you can set up a workplace setting in which work gets done while they progress through the grieving process.

The length and extent of the grief experience will be different for each person. However, some people can go through a harder grief process that upsets their normal functioning, including their ability to work effectively over a period of time. Examples of such problems are increased absenteeism, mistakes, lowered productivity, emotional outbursts and relationship troubles. If you note that an associates job performance suffers in such a way, call Carelon Wellbeing to talk about the best ways to intervene.

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Onsite or virtual counseling through Carelon Wellbeing

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You can ask that a Carelon Wellbeing counselor meet with your group to talk about the loss of the associate and the grief process. As your team may be processing the loss at varying rates, it may be helpful to have a counselor available after initially sharing the news, and then return again in a few days to continue to offer support.

Should you have concerns about a specific associate or need help dealing with your own reactions, you can also call Carelon for a consultation with a Leader Support Specialist.

Self-care

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Don't underestimate the toll that the loss of an associate can take on you. Be mindful of getting plenty of rest, nourishment, and support from your family and friends. You can't be an effective leader without caring for yourself.

Resources

https://hospicefoundation.org/category/grief/

https://www.apa.org/topics/grief/tools