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### Grief management and the workplace



Photo: [Bobbi Dombrowski](#)

Losing a loved one is always stressful, as we are left behind to find a way to cope with our grief and eventually resume our normal lives—including the lives we lead in the workplace.

I learned firsthand how difficult it can be to handle career responsibilities while coping with a loved one's passing. Around this time last year, my grandmother was hospitalized for an affliction that would later take her life. When it became clear how dire the situation had become, a pattern developed that would dictate how much I could accomplish for the next several months—my productivity became directly correlated with my grandmother's prognosis. On the days that her condition appeared to improve, my energy level and output increased. But as her health steadily declined, any concentration and interest in the work I usually love began to flatline. As the summer turned into fall, my grandmother's illness claimed her life and with it, any hope that I could sit at my desk and concentrate on anything other than crying.

In a sense, however, I was lucky. Unlike many people trying to work through this kind of loss, I am self-employed. I could work in my pajamas, take breaks for a good cry, and receive frequent calls during the day about my grandmother's progress with little consequence to my work. But for those working in an organization, dealing with the death of a loved one can be much more difficult.

The good news is there are a lot of ways to get through your grief and back on the road to work productivity. In "[Dealing with Death and Grief in the Workplace](#)," Kirsti A. Dyer outlines ways to handle the responsibilities of your job while coping with the death of a loved one. Some of the strategies that Dyer suggests include:

**Understanding and accepting your feelings.** There is no blueprint on how to handle grief, so you should do what feels right for you. If you feel like you need to take all of your bereavement time off from work, that's fine. If you think that working and keeping busy will help you get through it, that's fine too. The important thing is to be realistic. Expect that it will take time for you to heal and know that special occasions without your loved one will be painful for a while.

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**Allowing others to help you.** Although you should recognize that some people don't feel comfortable with the complicated feelings associated with loss, there will be others at work who are more than willing to give you the support that you need. Let them. Share your feelings with those who are willing to lend an ear.

**Talking to your supervisor about your concerns.** If you need extra time off from work, a more flexible schedule or an adjustment to your workload after losing a loved one, be sure to communicate these needs to your boss.

#### **How to help a colleague cope with the loss of a loved one**

If you are the coworker of someone working through grief after the loss of a loved one, Dyer suggests that you

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remember that any support that you can offer will help your colleague heal. If you feel comfortable listening to your grieving coworker vent the feelings of loss, make yourself available for those [discussions](#). If you are not quite as touchy-feely, however, you can still express your condolences in [writing](#) if that makes you feel more comfortable. Another thing that you can do to help a grieving coworker is to provide needed assistance—such as pet sitting, cooking, or helping with errands.

If you are the boss of someone who has lost a loved one, remember that your support is also valued by your employee. One way that you can give this support is to let your employee know about all of the resources that are available to assist with these situations—such as grief counselors and other support. It is also helpful, if your employee gives you permission, to tell coworkers about the circumstances surrounding the death. This will save your staff member the trouble of explaining the situation over and over again, as well as prevent any [rumors](#) from spreading around the water cooler—especially if the death was the result of an accident or a [crime](#).

*This article originally appeared on my [Workplace Communication Examiner](#) page on July 7th, 2009.*

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