

COVID-19 is Changing How Employees Grieve

Death is never easy to process, especially when it happens unexpectedly. People find comfort and grieve in different ways, whether it's connecting with family, talking to a friend, focusing on a special project, journaling, or another activity. Social distancing and stress related to COVID-19 can make it even more difficult to accept and grieve a person's death. Counselors at Inova have put together several recommendations to help people grieve in a healthy way given the limitations imposed by the coronavirus pandemic.

Acknowledge your feelings. Losing someone you care about suddenly is a challenge, and when you add the stress of social distancing and COVID-19, this can create more complications with your emotions. So, take the time to recognize your feelings and know that what you're feeling is reasonable because grieving during a pandemic is a very different experience for you.

Find a way to say goodbye. Rituals are very important in the grieving process, especially when you can't say goodbye in person. You can write a letter to the person, light a candle, talk to a photo, or whatever you find that has a meaning for you to help you understand that the person is not there anymore.

Be aware that there's not a "right" or "bad" way of grieving. The process of grieving is not linear, it's not a series of "steps" to follow. One day you may feel very sad, and the following day you may feel angry or hopeless. Be patient and compassionate with yourself. Reach out to family and friends. You don't have to go through your grief alone. Even if the situation doesn't allow physical contact, you can call or video chat with your family and friends. As soon as you are ready to share your feelings with them, don't hesitate.

Practice self-care. Managing intense emotions can require a lot of energy. In these moments, you may need to take special care of yourself, including eating as healthy as possible, drinking water, sleeping enough, doing some exercises or activities that you love. Be aware if you are having difficulties managing behaviors, like smoking or drinking alcohol, don't hesitate to ask for help if you need it.

Don't make important decisions. You may need time to manage your emotions and adapt to living without your loved one. Intellectually, it can be hard to think clearly as memory, learning, and cognitive functions can be affected. Don't push yourself to make important decisions that can have important consequences in your life.

Source: Franco, F. & Gregg-Meeker, C. (2020, May 11). Unexpected death and COVID-19 (A. Gaddis, Ed.). Raleigh, NC: Workplace Options

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