



Navigating loss in the workplace

How to help grieving employees

It's inevitable that at some point in your career, you'll be in the position to help an employee who has suffered the loss of a loved one. How you respond to this traumatic situation can have a significant impact on your employee's wellbeing now and in the future. Consider these helpful tips:

Prepare and protect

You can help your employees prepare for the loss of a loved one before it happens. In particular, employees with aging parents may be wondering how to talk to them about end-of-life issues. Research shows that discussions about end-of-life care, conflict resolution, and estate planning can lead to less grief and greater acceptance of the loss when it happens. To help your employees prepare for the inevitable, take action:

- Host educational sessions on estate planning and other topical issues.
- Refer employees to Lincoln's [Unspoken Plan resources](#) for more information on estate planning.
- Communicate the importance of end-of-life care decisions and share impactful resources like the [Conversation Project](#), which is dedicated to helping people talk about their wishes for end-of-life care.

Empathize and assist

When employees experience loss, start by expressing your condolences (avoid telling them how they should feel or that they will be okay). Then, discuss how you can help.

Communication

Ask if (and how) they would like information about the loss conveyed to co-workers.

Schedule

Find out if they'd prefer to stay home or come to work, if their workload needs to be adjusted, and how they'd prefer to communicate over the next few weeks.

Time-off

Discuss their expectations for funeral, memorial, and other loss-related time away from work—and inform them of available leave benefits and options.

Support

Ask what they would like the workplace to do in regard to wake, funeral, or memorial services. For example, ask if they would like co-workers to attend the wake or if they are collecting donations in memory of their loved one.

Resources

Let them know there are resources available through your HR department and life and health care plans, such as an Employee Assistance Program (EAP), grief counseling, financial assistance, and real estate help.

Connection

Encourage them to stay close to family and friends who can offer invaluable support during the grieving process.

In the aftermath of the loss and around the time of the funeral, avoid communicating with employees about work issues. However, it's helpful to establish when you'll be back in touch with them—for example, let them know you'll touch base in a week.



Communicate and collaborate

During difficult times, communication is essential—both with grieving employees and with their coworkers.

Advise co-workers based on the wishes of the employee. If appropriate, encourage co-workers to reach out to the employee with their condolences. Remind them that the grieving employee may not be able to return to full productivity for several months.

Re-connect periodically with the grieving employee. It's normal for desires, emotions, and ability to cope to change as the employee goes through the grieving process. Again, you may offer to help (or find resources) to deal with administrative details—after a week or two, the grieving employee may have more questions about benefits, legal, or financial resources.

Looking for support? The Lincoln Life "Taking the Next Step" brochure is a great place to start.

Look for signs of complicated grief or grief-related clinical depression.

These conditions can be serious and require treatment. If you notice any of the following signs, you or a human resources representative may need to refer employees to EAP counseling services or suggest that they seek help.

- **Signs of complicated grief**—More intense sadness, isolation, periodic inability to function well at work or at home, crying, obsession about the deceased, or insomnia—with no improvement over a few months, or persisting for more than six months.
- **Signs of depression**—Consistent difficulty functioning at work, distraction, poor concentration, insomnia, fatigue, loss of appetite, depressed mood, feelings of guilt and worthlessness, suicidality, hallucinations, persistent negative thoughts and pessimism, irritability, or loss of interest in things previously enjoyed.



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