

Dealing with grief



Workplaces are not immune to experiencing trauma and loss, but we may feel unsure about how we manage these emotions and reactions in the workplace. This can be particularly true when someone that we have worked with for a period of time- is suddenly not there. This may cause pain, loss, and a challenge to be able to maintain our focus.

Leaders have a key role to play in managing grief in the workplace – it is important they are empathetic, compassionate and respectful.

The five stages of grief

There are five stages of grief. Not everyone will experience all of them, and they are not presented in any order.

- **Denial** – not being able to process the loss initially. Comments may include "I can't believe it. Is there any chance it is not true?"
- **Anger** – often demonstrated as a way to mask the real emotions. Examples of comments may be "Someone will pay for this. How could let this happen?"
- **Bargaining** – grief brings vulnerability and a sense of helplessness. Some examples may include "If only I took more notice. If I had taken the time to go and visit."
- **Depression** – this is a stage that can last for a longer period and can lead to concerns around mental health. Some examples of comments may include "What's the point? It doesn't matter anymore."
- **Acceptance** – this is not a positive reaction but more a transition and understanding of the loss and your ongoing journey. Examples of comments may be "I am really pleased I knew that person for a time. It is important to keep going."

Caring for colleagues

- Do not judge reactions
- Give permission for emotions to be expressed
- Be respectful
- Check in with each other regularly
- Offer professional support as required
- Allow a reasonable amount of time before expecting everyone to 'move on'
- Provide time off, role modification, external counselling support, attendance of funerals etc.