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Contact Us

If you or a co-worker are in need please do not hesitate to reach out to us.
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***CRITICAL INCIDENT
RESPONSE TEAM***

Surviving A Co-Worker Suicide

The death of a coworker is often shocking and upsetting. When a coworker commits suicide, there are often unanswered questions and complicated emotions. People's reactions to suicide vary and can range from guilt, to sorrow to anger. This booklet contains some similar reactions and thoughts experienced by the survivors of suicide.

Why do people commit suicide?

Every suicide is a unique story. There is no predictable ‘profile’ of a person who will commit suicide. Therefore, there is no way to fully understand why a person would choose to take their own life. However, there are some explanations that may help you better understand a person’s actions.

Significant depression is one of the primary reasons for suicide. Depression is a characteristic of a number of medical and behavioral conditions. When depression becomes pervasive enough, some people may feel hopeless, helpless and alone. When this happens, sometimes the person may begin to believe that suicide is the only alternative or solution. Some conditions affect the person’s ability to think rationally and to control impulses. Sometimes the loss of rational thought, coupled with depression, can lead a person to think, “I want this ‘pain’ to go away...there is no other way out of this....” or “The world would be a better place without me.”

Serious illness, chronic pain, substance abuse, life crisis, high anxiety, agitation, marital, financial, or even work-related difficulties can sometimes trigger depressive reactions and irrational thinking that can develop into suicidal thoughts.

How to help a grieving co-worker

- Allow the person to express his or her feelings openly. Those who are grieving need to work through their feelings and often do so by sharing their thoughts and feelings with others.
- Be non-judgmental about the other person’s feelings. Each person has his or her own feelings about death and suicide.
- Be mindful of difficult dates. The day or date of the suicide can be especially difficult for the next six months for survivors.
- If a grieving person is expressing suicidal feelings, strongly encourage them to get immediate help.

Helping yourself

- Ask for support from your friends and family. Someone you know has died, and it is natural to feel that loss.
- Talk about your feelings with people who can be non-judgmental and supportive.
- Seek out your co-workers who are having similar feelings, as they might best understand how you feel.
- Take advantage of support services that are made available to you. Group interventions that are designed to help surviving co-workers pull together can be helpful in understanding each other’s feelings.
- Seek additional support if you feel you are having a difficult time coping with the suicide. If you are currently in treatment for depression or other psychological conditions, it may be a good idea to contact your doctor or therapist if you are having trouble handling what has happened. Other supportive services include your Employee Assistance Program (EAP), your family doctor, clergy and local grief groups that can be located through your community hospital, hospice or mental health agencies.

Ways people react to the suicide of a co-worker

• **Uniquely Personal:** Each person will have their own response to a death by suicide of someone they know. It is important to understand and respect those differences. Some people may react and need to talk and others may not.

• **Shock and Disbelief:** It’s common to experience shock and disbelief upon finding out of a suicide. A person’s suicide often leaves many questions unanswered. It is very frustrating to not have answers that explain why someone would take their own life. Even when survivors learn and understand the factors related to the suicide, such as depressive illness, no one ever can fully answer the “why” the suicide happened. It is normal to struggle with questions about ‘why’ this happened.

• **Guilt:** Often people develop feelings of guilt surrounding the suicide of a co-worker, believing that somehow, they should have recognized the threat and that they could have done something to prevent the suicide. These feelings are normal and common, but are most often not truly justified.

• **Anger:** This is a common feel that people may have after someone has committed suicide. A person may feel emotionally rejected, made the object of blame or speculations, or left to handle the emotional and practical challenges of a death by suicide. Anger is often mixed with grief and can feel confusing and unclear. Suicide usually produces more anger than any other type of death.

• **Sadness:** Intense sadness is a normal part of the grieving process. This sadness, especially when mixed with guilt and anger, can seem overwhelming. It is a natural part of the process, and it should fade over time.

• **Blame:** A common reaction is to blame those close to the victim, because they ‘should’ve seen the warning signs’ or ‘could’ve prevented the act’. Although an understandable reaction to grief, it is incorrect and unwarranted and could compound the grief of those who are left behind.