



REACTIONS TO SUICIDE

Employees who are faced with the suicide of a co-worker or a significant other will likely experience some grief reactions. Many experience feelings of shock, helplessness, anger, and anxiety. Some may find it more difficult to concentrate or to complete tasks at work. People may avoid things that remind them of the person who has died. Any and all of these reactions are normal when we are confronted with suicide in the workplace. Below are listed some common reactions to suicide and grief and some suggestions on how to cope with them. These reactions to suicide are particularly common in the first few weeks following the death.

Emotional Reactions:

Depression: A pattern of depressed mood and thinking are quite common soon after a suicide. Some signs of being depressed are:

- Feeling hopeless
- Feeling that your life has no purpose
- Crying, sometimes uncontrollably or at unexpected times
- Inability to feel pleasure in activities you enjoyed prior
- Lack of physical and emotional energy
- Feeling like a terrible heaviness is pressing you down
- Profound sadness
- Feeling like you don't want to go on living

Anger: Persons impacted by suicide are sometimes surprised to realize how angry they are. Without your consent, a person you knew has permanently changed things. It is natural to feel angry. Here are some anger responses that may occur:

- Irritability and lack of patience
- Feeling upset that your life has been ripped apart
- Blaming others, yourself, or the person who died
- Feeling angry that the person who committed suicide could have been so indifferent to the impact of his/her death on your life.
- A strong, physical urge to break or smash something
- A need to scream, yell, or cry
- Feeling resentful about not receiving the support you thought you would from others.



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Cognitive Reactions:

Thinking & Memory Impairment: You may feel numb, dazed and overwhelmed. For some people these reactions may continue for weeks and have significant impact on work and/or personal functioning. Common signs of emotional reactions include:

- Problems in speaking
- Disbelief
- Feelings of unreality about the facts of the suicide
- Feeling as if you were in a dream, feeling disconnected from your body, or no emotions.
- Confusion and disorientation
- Feeling as if you are in a fog or a dream
- Forgetfulness
- Trouble thinking clearly

Denial: Denial is natural in the beginning. The suicide may be too much to comprehend all at once. Here are some things that you might find yourself saying to other people:

- “No, it’s not true!”
- “This is a nightmare.”
- “I can’t believe this!”
- “This could not have been a suicide.”

Physical Reactions

Our physical self is not immune to a loss. Normal, physical symptoms of grief include:

- Back/Neck/Muscle Pain
- Appetite/Sleep Problems
- Weight loss
- Headaches/Stomach Upset
- Physical Restlessness/Hyperactivity
- Fatigue/Dizziness
- Chest pains



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Things You Can Do to Cope Following a Suicide Death:

- **Be aware of each other.**
Everyone copes in his or her own way. If you notice someone is having a hard time, talk to them, express concern and encourage them to seek additional support through the Employee Assistance Program or another resource.
- **Accept that work may be affected.**
Job performance and interactions may be affected by stress. In time, things will return to normal. Be tolerant and flexible with yourself and each other.
- **If your workgroup has experienced a death, contact the family of the deceased.**
Consider ways you and your group can be involved in efforts to memorialize and remember the person who has died. Consider sending pictures, a scrapbook or a collection of memories written by your workgroup.
- **Remind yourself and others that this is a stressful time and that engaging in healthy behaviors can help.**
Eating well and getting enough rest becomes even more important during times of high stress or sadness. Exercise and limiting the use of alcohol or other substances to cope with negative feelings can decrease the extra tension that often goes along with loss and grief.
- **Remember that extra support and guidance is available. Contact PERS at 703 692-8917** for more individualized information or for additional support. We can help.