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EAP EMPLOYEE ENHANCEMENT NEWSLETTER



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Coworkers Facing Grief Together

The news hits hard: A coworker has died. Maybe you knew the person really well, maybe you didn't, but in either case the news momentarily freezes you, prompting you to consider the fragility of life and the priorities you bring to it. Perhaps, at least for a moment, work doesn't seem all that important anymore. But very quickly reality sets in, along with a sense of not knowing what to do next. You have a job to do. Life goes on. People around you are confused. There is no employee manual for this, no training, and no expectation. But there are ways to cope, to honor the deceased without long-term disruption in the workplace.



First things first.

The nature of one's response to the news of a coworker's death depends on the nature of the relationship. Close friends and longtime associates logically will have a deeper level of grief. Company management may or may not officially acknowledge the occasion with activities. If the deceased was a manager or executive, the company may logically be more formal in its recognition. It is normal for a business organization to be more formal the more well-known the deceased person was. But regardless of the dynamics, certain responses are logical, expected, and beneficial.

First, don't be afraid to talk to your peers about your feelings. Remember the deceased, whether it's an informal gathering in the break room or an official company meeting. Talk about how it makes you feel, and listen as your peers do the same. Work it out together.

If management doesn't officially acknowledge the loss, ask your supervisor or the deceased's manager for support in making the time for employees to grieve together. Employees who meet together often generate wonderful ideas for how to support the family of the deceased and commemorate the person's life.

The power of being proactive.

In addition to talking it out, it is helpful to actually do something in response to the news. Organize a fundraiser to help the family, or to make a contribution that honors the deceased. Create some form of memorial, either temporary—such as a collection of flowers and cards on the property—or a plaque. Maybe plant a tree on the grounds. Be sure to get management's approval for these activities, which in most cases will be supported.

Many companies have established Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) that provide grief counseling and other assistance in these situations. Don't hesitate to avail yourself of this resource, especially if you were close to the deceased. Grief is personal, and everyone reacts differently. People are often surprised by their own response. Don't judge a coworker's reaction that is different than yours. A coworker who has experienced a recent death in his or her family may appear to react more strongly than others.

There's no easy way to address your grief. But the important thing is to find a positive way to address it, to share it with coworkers, and to proactively honor the deceased. And if the process allows you to realign your priorities to get more out of life and work going forward, then at least something good will have come out of the experience.

Source: National Institutes of Health, Office of Research Services, Division of Occupational Health & Safety, Occupational Medical Service. (n.d.). Coworkers facing grief together. Retrieved November 18, 2016, from <http://www.ors.od.nih.gov/>

Invest in Yourself

For a better future and a better present, invest in yourself. Make a commitment to personal and professional growth, better health, stronger relationships, and a more fulfilling life. Here are some ways to invest in yourself, many of which won't cost a dime.

Invest in your skills and knowledge.

Lifelong learning is a key to self-improvement. Many jobs require ongoing skill development just to keep pace with constant change. Beyond that, learning can expand your horizons, open new opportunities, and be a source of joy and satisfaction in and of itself. Think creatively about ways you can keep learning, whether it's another language, a new skill, or new perspectives on the world. Options include

- Classes and degree programs
- Webinars and workshops that may be available to you at no cost
- Online training, from formal programs to posted videos and tutorials
- Reading or listening to books, articles, blogs, podcasts, and informative programs
- Travel
- Museum visits
- Learning new skills from coworkers and friends

Invest in your health.

With a healthy body, you'll have more energy and more to give—now and in the years to come. Make healthy habits part of your routine, including

- Regular physical activity and exercise
- Healthy eating, including a variety of nutritious foods with a minimum of added sugar and salt
- Healthy sleep habits
- Routine medical checkups and visits

Invest in your emotional wellbeing.

Happiness is one goal of emotional wellbeing. Others include the ability to handle strong emotions in healthy ways and connect with others on an emotional level. To build self-awareness and emotional maturity for greater happiness in life, you might try:

- Recognizing the signs of stress and finding effective ways to keep it in check
- Countering negative self-talk with positive and confident thoughts
- Journaling
- Practicing gratitude

- Meditation or mindfulness practices
- Working with a coach or therapist

Invest in your creativity.

Find ways to bring more creativity into your life, for your own enjoyment and to hone your ability to find new solutions to problems and challenges. There are lots of ways to exercise your creativity:

- Make things—with woodworking, ceramics, jewelry, sewing, or knitting.
- Learn an instrument or return to one you played in the past.
- Join a creative group—to sing, play music, or act.
- Draw, paint, or sculpt, or try your hand at another visual art.
- Write—stories, poems, memories, or even a book.
- Invent your own recipes.
- Design your own clothes.

Invest in healthy relationships.

Social connections and supportive relationships are closely linked to overall wellbeing, including emotional and physical health. Invest in yourself by cultivating important relationships:

- Stay in touch with family and friends. Make time to connect, listen, and enjoy each other's company.
- Choose which friendships to maintain. Friendships that are a drain on your energy and make you feel bad about yourself are not worth keeping. Focus on the friendships in which you care about and encourage each other, listen as much as you talk, and offer support when it's needed.
- Expand your social and professional network to include people who lift your spirits, challenge you to be better, and expand your knowledge and skills.
- Find a mentor.

The time you spend improving yourself, learning new skills, broadening your perspectives, attending to your health, gaining emotional maturity, and strengthening relationships will pay you back many times over. Investing in a better you is the way to reach a better future and enjoy a better life now.

Source: Morgan, H. (2021, June 3). Invest in yourself (C. Meeker & B. Schuette, Eds.). Raleigh, NC: Workplace Options.

Gather and Share Your Family Health History

If you are concerned about a disease running in your family, collect your family health history and talk to your doctor at your next visit. A doctor can evaluate all of the factors, including family health history, that may affect your risk of diseases and can recommend ways to reduce that risk.

Knowing your family health history can benefit you at any age.

Holidays and other special occasions offer opportunities for your family to share a meal—and your family health history. You and your family members share genes, and you may also have similar behaviors, cultures, and environments, each of which may affect your risk of developing health problems. Family health history takes all of these factors into account.

Everyone in your family can benefit from knowing your family's health history and sharing this information with his or her doctor.

- **Before and during pregnancy**—If you are a woman with a family health history of a birth defect or genetic disorder, like sickle cell disease, you might have a higher risk of having a baby with this condition. Knowing your risk is important so that you can find and address potential health problems early. There may also be steps you can take to reduce your risk, such as taking folic acid to help prevent spina bifida. Remember to collect family health history from the baby's father, too.
- **Children**—Many genetic disorders are first detected in childhood, and knowing about a history of a genetic condition in your family can help your child's doctor find and treat the condition early.
- **Young adults**—A family health history of chronic diseases like diabetes or heart disease can mean that you should start screening tests earlier. For example, if you have a family health history of early onset heart disease, it is recommended that you start cholesterol screening at age 20.
- **Adults**—Family health history can help your doctor decide what screening tests and other interventions you need and when. For example, if you have a grandmother, aunt, mother, or sister who had breast cancer before age 50, you may want to talk to your doctor about whether cancer genetic counseling might be right for you.

- **Older adults**—If you are one of the older members of your family, you may know more about diseases and health conditions in your family, especially in relatives who are no longer living. Be sure to share this information with your younger relatives so that you may all benefit from knowing this family health history information.

No matter what their ages are, everyone in your family can benefit from a healthy lifestyle, such as eating healthily, being physically active, and not smoking.

Are you ready to collect your family health history but don't know where to start? Here's how!

How to collect your family health history

The Surgeon General's My Family Health Portrait is a free Web-based tool that can help you and your family collect and organize family health history information: <http://www.hhs.gov/familyhistory/>.

My Family Health Portrait allows you to share this information easily with your doctor:

- **The first step is to talk to your family.** Write down the names of blood relatives you need to include in your history. The most important relatives to include in your family health history are your parents, brothers and sisters, and children. Next, you may want to talk to grandparents, uncles and aunts, nieces and nephews, and half-brothers and half-sisters.
- **Ask questions.** To find out about your risk for chronic diseases, ask your relatives about which of these diseases they have had and when they were diagnosed. Questions can include the following:
 - Do you have any chronic diseases, such as heart disease or diabetes, or health conditions such as high blood pressure or high cholesterol?
 - Have you had any other serious diseases, such as cancer or stroke?
 - How old were you when each of these diseases was diagnosed?
 - What is our family's ancestry – what country did we come from?
 - For relatives who have died, be sure to ask about cause and age of death.



factor to consider. If you are concerned about diseases that are common in your family, talk to your doctor at your next visit. A doctor can evaluate all of the factors, including family health history, that may affect your risk of some diseases, and can recommend ways to reduce that risk.

My Family Health Portrait lets you know your risk (increased or not increased) for diabetes and colon cancer based on your family health history and other risk factors. Even if you have a high-risk family health history of diabetes, colon cancer, or another condition, that does not mean that you or your family members will definitely get that disease. It is important that you talk to your doctor about steps that you can take to lower your chances of getting the disease. You have already taken the first step by learning about your family health history!

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). (Updated 2015, November 16). Gather and share your family health history. Retrieved January 13, 2016, from <http://www.cdc.gov/>

- **Record the information.** Write this information down, and be sure to update it from time to time. To organize the information in your family health history you could use a free Web-based tool such as My Family Health Portrait (above).

Share family health history information with your doctor and other family members. Your family health history can give you an idea of your risk for chronic diseases like cancer, heart disease, and diabetes, but it is not the only