

## Honoring a Colleague

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Colleagues should be encouraged to share their grief. Perhaps they can get together at lunch to discuss their feelings about, and memories of, their deceased colleague. They can organize a memorial service before or after work.

In addition to a memorial service, colleagues can find other, more permanent ways, to memorialize the deceased. Events can be dedicated as a tribute to someone or rooms can be named after him or her. Think about naming the annual company picnic after a lost colleague. That way, the person can be remembered at a time of celebration, not only at a time of mourning.

Another way to memorialize someone is to establish a fund in that person's name. Perhaps a scholarship fund can be set up for his or her children. Maybe money can be donated to that person's favorite charity, or if the person died of a particular illness, money can be donated to that cause.

Create a book of memories—this book can be given to the family as a way to let them know of their loved one's work life. These reflections can become unique memories for the family, and a way for you to privately express feelings and memories. It's also a helpful way of letting family members know their loved one was a valued employee and is missed.

Most important, give yourself an opportunity to remember the person you lost. Think of the positive contributions he or she made to your life and to the lives of others and try to make similar contributions.

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## Who can help?

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The Victim Services Unit within the Travis County Sheriff's Office can assist in responding to the needs of individuals and the community following a critical incident. The VSU is also available to provide referrals to appropriate community helping professionals or organizations according to your specific needs.



## Resources

### The Christi Center

512-467-2600

[www.christicenter.org](http://www.christicenter.org)

### Austin Center for Grief and Loss

512-472-7878

[www.austingrief.org](http://www.austingrief.org)

### 2-1-1 Texas

2-1-1 or 1-877-541-7905

[www.211texas.org](http://www.211texas.org)

## Death of a Colleague

**Victim Services Unit**  
**5555 Airport Blvd**  
**Austin, TX 78751**  
**512-854-9709**

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**Name/ID Number:**

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**Direct Number:**

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**Mailing Address:**

**PO Box 1748**

**Austin, TX 78767**

## What to Expect

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### **People experience grief differently.**

You or a colleague who was particularly close to the person who died, may feel depressed, absent-minded, short-tempered, or exhausted. These are all normal feelings.

### **Creating healthy memories is part of the healing process.**

Some people find talking about the deceased helps them manage their grief. Others keep to themselves. Respect the fact that others may feel the loss more or less strongly than you, or tend to cope differently.

### **A death generates questions and fears about our own mortality.**

If a colleague dies, we may feel guilty or angry at that person, at life, or even at the medical profession. It may cause you to question your own life and how temporary life is with those we love. These are all normal reactions .

### **Be aware of your reactions to a deceased colleague's replacement or even clearing their work area.**

Your anger and disappointment at his/her performance, personality or work style, may be less about the individual than your grief about the person they are replacing. Be mindful that clearing the work area is a policy matter that management must adhere to—it's not about trying to erase the person's memory too quickly.

### **Seek help.**

Be aware there may be times when talking to a trained professional might be helpful, especially if you are having ongoing difficulty dealing with the loss or if your work performance declines. This can be a signal that this loss or others are affecting you more profoundly than you thought. Ask your Human Resources Department if they provide an Employee Assistance Program (EAP). These services assist in referring you to professionals in your area who specialize in grief and loss.

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## Coping with the Death

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The death of a colleague leaves both a personal and professional void in a workplace. We spend many hours of our lives with our colleagues. We form relationships with them, even if only to say hello as you pass by someone's desk each day. A colleague's death can mean the loss of a friend, but also the loss of someone we depend on to help us do our jobs.

One generally isn't given sufficient time to mourn the death of a colleague. When a relative dies, we are given a few days off to mourn. When a close friend dies, you can usually take a personal day to grieve. However, when a colleague dies, an entire office cannot simply stop working.

The employer, who may be personally touched by the death of an employee, must also confront the effect the death will have on the business. The departed employee had a specific role in the workplace. He or she had a job that still must get done. Generally, the position can't just be eliminated. It falls upon management to replace someone who, on a personal level, may seem irreplaceable.

It is often difficult for colleagues to accept someone new occupying a job and possibly the work area of the deceased. It can also be difficult, but necessary, to make this new person feel welcome.

## The Grieving Process

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Feelings and symptoms of grief can take weeks, months, and even years to individually process. We do not follow or heal according to a timetable, but over time our emotions do ease. The brief time that is given to attend the wake and funeral only touches on the beginning stages of grief.

The feelings and symptoms can be different for each of us, but may include: shock, denial, anger, guilt, anxiety, exhaustion, irritability, sleep disruption, overwhelming sadness, and problems with concentration. Most of the time we feel several of these at the same time, but in varying degrees. The extent, depth and duration will depend on how close we were to the deceased, the circumstances of the death, and our own situation and losses that we have experienced.

Some outcomes of grief may include: Finding a new balance (which doesn't necessarily mean that things will ever be the same), and Growth (which means readiness to move ahead with one's life).

## Benefits of Counseling

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Some of the benefits of seeking counseling are:

- Reviewing the incident and processing the event can help survivors clarify what actually occurred.
- Counseling can help develop coping skills and strategies—allowing for the continuance of school, work or relationships.
- Establishment of a support network helps to decrease negative physical, psychological and emotional effects that often result from the traumatic experience.

Survivors can utilize the experience as an opportunity to build and practice confidence, assertiveness, and protective instinct skills.

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