

WorkWell

A Deloitte podcast series to empower your well-being



Special COVID-19 Edition

Episode #5: WorkWell: Grief and loss – Supporting each other through tough times

We all go through loss at some point in our lives. Many of us associate grief with the death of a loved one, but that's not always the case. People grieve for many other reasons, including divorce or a break-up, loss of health, loss of a job or financial security, or loss of a pet. And, as the COVID-19 pandemic continues, most if not all of us have experienced some form of grief around the loss of life as we know it, normalcy and routines, the loss of control, and the loss of connections. And yet, for such a collective experience, it's still something we struggle to talk about.

Hi, I'm Jen Fisher – Deloitte US Chief Well-being Officer, and I'm here today to provide you with some strategies to deal with loss and grief you may be experiencing, as well as supporting others who are experiencing a loss.

It's normal and healthy to mourn any kind of loss. When you're suffering, remember that your loss is just as important as anyone else's. Likewise, when someone else is grieving, their pain is valid no matter why they feel it. The more we can recognize the many sources of loss, the better we are able to recognize other people's grief and be responsive to their needs.

Grief is universal and yet at the same time it is a completely individual experience, with no constants and no right or wrong. Everyone's experience is unique. Grief can reach into every area of our lives, impacting us emotionally, physically, and behaviorally. Sometimes a loss can take on a snowball effect and leave us feeling powerless and out of control.

Here are some strategies to help you cope with grief:

- First, allow yourself to experience the pain and loss. Let yourself grieve and fully experience your feelings without judgment. It's OK to be not OK. Set aside private time and space to process and release the intense emotions that may arise. If necessary, seek professional help for guidance on how to cope with your loss.
- Be kind to yourself. Allow your grief to unfold at a pace that is natural for you without judging or criticizing yourself.

- Talking about your loss and sadness may help you process and release your feelings. Seek out support from friends and family that you feel comfortable around even when you aren't feeling well. Consider joining a support group in your community. Capturing your feelings, thoughts, and memories in a journal can also help you reflect and heal.
- Part of healing is going back and forth between experiencing the grief and adjusting to the new "normal." Avoid isolating yourself from others, even if you have to remain physically distanced. Take time out to connect with supportive friends and family. It's okay to take a break from grieving.
- Build healthy habits. Grief can sometimes feel so overwhelming that we neglect basic self-care practices. Try to get restful sleep at night, eat nutritious meals, and engage in physical activities. Include relaxation and meditation practices. Keeping a daily routine can help you structure your time to maintain normalcy.
- Grief can be mentally and physically exhausting. To manage your energy, plan for slack in your day and take extra breaks for recovery.

In times of loss, nobody expects us to be an expert on grief, but there are things we can do that can make a big difference for a colleague going through a difficult time.

Start by acknowledging the loss and letting them know you care. Expressions of sympathy are noticed and appreciated.

It can be difficult to know exactly what to say or do when someone experiences a loss. Don't let your fear of saying the wrong thing prevent you from being there for someone. Be brave and reach out in whatever way feels most natural and comfortable for you, or in a way you think your grieving colleague would appreciate. Their response will guide you on how to proceed.

Don't feel you have to do or say something specific. Just be there. Be patient and be available to listen. For many people, talking is part of the healing process. Listening shows that you care. If you're not sure how to help, come up with a few specific suggestions and ask the person if they'd like support in any of those ways.

Some people welcome the opportunity to share their grief with friends and colleagues. Others may need a little more time or want to keep things private. Respect their choice and give them the space that they need.

Grieving is a process. As your colleague returns to work, they may need some time to readjust. Mood swings and distractibility can be common. Be patient and continue to offer support where you can.

Grief doesn't have an expiration date. Keep checking in weeks and months later. Someone may look like they are coping well but inside, they may be struggling.

The feelings of sadness, guilt, or anger after a loss generally lessen over time. But for some of us, grief can become overwhelming and debilitating, disrupting our ability to work, carry out daily activities, and engage in satisfying relationships. When grief gets complicated and you or someone you know struggle for an extended period after a loss, it may be time to seek additional help. Talk to your primary care physician about your experience with grief – they can help you or refer you to a mental health professional with experience in grief counseling. Mental health services may be available through your health insurance plan at work. There are also a number of online resources.

Getting through a loss and going through the grieving process is challenging under any circumstances. Whether you're dealing with a loss or supporting a colleague, remember that empathy, compassion, and kindness – to both ourselves and to those in need – are the keys to helping the healing begin.

I hope you found this information helpful. Until next time, be well, everyone.

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