

SUICIDE

How to deal as a colleague with the suicide of a staff member?

a colleague chose to leave life by suicide. he or she is no longer there. this must be terrible for the surviving relatives. they experience intense feelings of shock, disbelief, helplessness and distress, guilt and many why and how questions. through this leaflet we would also like to reflect on you and your colleagues. you who may be a little further away from the deceased, but who are also touched. we want to pay attention to what you are experiencing, we want to have an eye for possible reactions, realising that everyone deals with such a painful event in their own way.

The purpose of this document is threefold:

- To provide information about the coping process.
- To give a number of tips.
- To know when and how to call in professional help.

INFO ON THE COPING PROCESS

Grieving after a suicide is very complex. each employee, friend or colleague suffers in a unique way. Yet there are a number of characteristic themes.

- Often the bereaved search for information, the exact manner and circumstances in which the colleague died.
- The 'why question', the motives and finding an explanation for the suicide is very much inherent to the intentional nature of the suicide.
- Problems with concentration, sadness, reliving the experience, feelings of fear, suicidal thoughts, relief, guilt and anger are normal reactions after the suicide.

Whatever the reaction, it is a normal reaction to an abnormal situation.

PRACTICAL TIPS

- Saying goodbye in your own way is important. no matter how others react, follow your feelings, your needs and ask for space to do so.
- It is important to face the fact of the suicide. only then can you create the necessary, safe space for yourself and those around you to work through the grieving process and come to terms with this profound loss.
- As soon as you are ready, try to deepen the "how-what", this removes doubts and helps to accept the truth.
- Keep searching for an answer to the "why" question until you no longer need to know why or until you are satisfied with a partial answer.
- Perhaps you are struggling with the thought that your life has no meaning now either. talk about this and dare to seek specialised help.
- You are not crazy or ill, you are grieving.
- Don't try to avoid the pain, you have to "get through it", at your own pace.
- Try to live day by day.
- Postpone important decisions for a while.
- It is normal to experience physical reactions such as headaches, muscle aches, loss of appetite, sleep disorders.
- You may be overwhelmed by a chaos of intense feelings, but all these feelings are normal.

- Shame, guilt, wanting to shut up and isolate yourself, confusion, poor concentration, forgetting everything: these are normal reactions to an abnormal situation.
- You may feel relieved that a sometimes long ordeal has come to an end.
- You may feel guilty for what you think you have done or not done.
- Remember that it was not your decision.
- You may also feel anger towards the victim, his family, the government, yourself... Anger is sometimes part of the grieving process, but it should not prevent you from expressing your underlying feelings of grief. Dare to face these feelings too.
- Give yourself time to grieve. Express your feelings for as long as it takes. Be patient with yourself and others.
- Expect a possible backlash. It is normal for waves of emotions to come back.
- Be aware that others are hurting too.
- Know that by "not acting" it will only get worse, that by "not going through your grief" you will never lose the pain.
- Find someone who listens to you, with whom you can be yourself, with whom you can share. Phone someone.
- Appeal to your self-confidence and to those around you to help you through this.
- Give in to the need to laugh. Laughter is healing.
- It is important to express your feelings. If you do not do it now, they will certainly come out at another time and in another way.

GRIEF STALLED - PROFESSIONAL HELP?

Grief is a normal and healthy reaction to an overwhelming loss. How can you tell if you or a colleague is grief stalled?

- You keep avoiding reality and you reason as if the deceased is still there. For example, you always speak in the present tense when talking about the deceased.
- You continue to sympathise with the deceased; you continue to live as if the deceased were present.
- You experience intense and prolonged anger and/or feelings of guilt.
- You experience intense and prolonged feelings of anxiety and depression, possibly accompanied by suicidal thoughts.
- You avoid situations and conversations that remind you of the loss.

This may manifest itself in restlessness, being constantly active without a clear goal. Physical complaints may also persist, such as rapid fatigue, muscle weakness, general physical tension, lack of appetite or even misery.

If you experience that the emotional reactions are too strong, or if you experience that the emotional reactions drag on too long, do not hesitate to call in professional help.

Suicide hot line • <https://www.therapyroute.com/article/suicide-hotlines-and-crisis-lines-in-belgium>