

# SUPPORTING A GRIEVING COLLEAGUE OFFERING CARE AND COMPASSION IN TIMES OF LOSS

We often feel helpless when a colleague is grieving – we want to take away their pain and ease their suffering. Each person grieves in their own way, and the grieving process has no timeline. The brief time given to attend the formal grieving rituals and events only touches on the initial experience of grief. To provide a compassionate response to a grieving colleague, these suggestions may be helpful.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Acknowledge their loss. Go to them rather than waiting for them to come to you. Let them know you are aware of the loss and that you are thinking about them.
- Share the sorrow. Allow them to talk about their feelings of loss and share memories of their loved one.
- Alternately, afford them space to be in stillness and quiet if they would prefer not to talk about the death.
- Avoid statements that make you as the witness feel better. It is not helpful to say: “It was for the best,” or “you’ll get over it in time.” Simply stating, “I am sad to hear about your loss,” or even “I don’t know what to say” can provide acknowledgment to the grieving person that you understand that this is hard for them.
- Anticipate difficult periods throughout the year, such as anniversaries, birthdays, holidays, and the day of the death.
- Encourage professional help when necessary.
- Offer practical assistance when appropriate. Resources or support for family care, cooking or providing meals, exercising pets, and running errands are some useful ways to help someone who is in the midst of grieving.
- Acknowledge that work responsibilities may need to be altered upon a return to work after a loss. As a co-worker, offer help where you are able.
- Be patient. People grieve in their own ways. Realize that unexpected moments of overwhelming grief are a normal and natural part of the journey.
- It is okay to mention the person who has died by name and encourage reminiscing.
- Above all, just listening while being present can help.

## QUESTIONS

For counseling and other resources to help faculty, staff, and supervisors, contact the university’s mental health teams for confidential, short-term counseling, consultation, information, and referrals.

Campus faculty and staff, contact the Faculty and Staff Counseling and Consultation Office (FASCCO). Call (734) 936-8660 or email [fascco@umich.edu](mailto:fascco@umich.edu).

Michigan Medicine faculty and staff, contact the Office of Counseling and Workplace Resilience (OCWR). Call 734-763-5409 or email [counseling@med.umich.edu](mailto:counseling@med.umich.edu).

***“Listening is a small but important gift to give.”***

**– Alan Wolfelt**