



Ask to Come Home. Ask for Caldwell Hospice.



An Employee's Serious Illness: What to Do

When an employee faces a serious illness, supervisors must balance their desire to be compassionate and supportive with their need to fulfill organizational responsibilities and goals. Ashewood Grief and Counseling Services provides end-of-life information to help local businesses deal with an employee's illness.

Providing Support for the Employee

- **Respect the person's privacy.** Talk with the employee to determine what information will be disclosed to co-workers. Encourage some disclosure to avoid rumors.
- **Educate yourself.** Learn your company's policies concerning leave, short-term disability, etc.
- **Be supportive and flexible, when possible.** Work around the person's new limitations and be supportive, while ensuring that these actions do not compromise your organization.
- **Keep your superiors informed.**
- **Maintain connections.** It's common for staff members to shy away from a seriously ill co-worker. Make sure the employee is still included in meetings and relevant decisions.
- **Keep in touch with an absent employee.** A continued connection to work matters to a seriously ill employee who is no longer able to come in every day. Ask whether the employee would like to be kept up-to-date on staff and organizational news—by phone call, e-mail, company newsletter, etc.
- **Encourage his/her co-workers to send cards, letters, and food, when appropriate.**

Providing Support for Your Staff

Supervisors are responsible for ensuring that the department remains productive. When employees face serious illnesses and cannot meet the requirements of their positions, the entire staff may be affected.

- Depending on the type of illness and prognosis, be prepared for anticipatory grief among your staff members.
- Other staff members may resent added responsibilities caused by the illness. Acknowledge their extra efforts and express appreciation.
- Consider transferring the ill employee to a less stressful, less physically demanding or part-time position.
- Consider adding staff during the employee's illness.
- Be open to discussion or meetings concerning these issues. Staff members will be comforted by your willingness to listen.

Common Reactions to Loss

Grief is a natural reaction to loss, and each employee will grieve differently. Even when employees show no outward signs of grief, they may be experiencing difficulties and need support.

- Anxiety
- Denial
- Withdrawal
- Difficulty concentrating
- Forgetfulness
- Irritability
- Apathy
- Guilt
- Lack of interest
- Headache or body aches

(Source: NHPCO's *It's About How You Live At Work* series.)

MAILING ADDRESS

902 Kirkwood Street, NW
Lenoir, NC 28645-5121

LENOIR LOCATION

1002 Ashe Avenue
828.754.0101

HUDSON LOCATION

526 Pine Mountain Road
828.754.0101



www.caldwellhospice.org