Supporting an Employee Through a Loss During the Holidays

During this holiday time, supporting an employee through a season of grief can be challenging. When someone loses someone close to them, it can be hard to know how to respond. Grief can bring on several stages of emotions, including feelings of shock, denial, guilt, anger, and/or depression. Often, these typical stages of grief happen in progression. However, some people may skip over a stage; some may be in a stage only briefly; and others may remain in one stage for a long period of time. By understanding that an employee who is grieving may be experiencing a range of emotions, you may be better able to empathize with what he/she is going through.

The suggestions offered below can help you support your team members who have experienced a loss. Depending on the relationship, you may adapt these suggestions to a level that is comfortable for you.

Be Sensitive. Be cautious with your word choice when speaking to the griever. Although well intended, expressions such as “I understand” and “I can imagine what it’s like” may not help, as loss and grief are different for each person. A simple “I’m sorry to hear of your loss” or “I’m thinking of you” are good ways to communicate your condolences. You may also want to write a special note to show you care.

Be Encouraging. Encourage the bereaved to care for him/herself. It is important that your employee attends to his/her own physical needs, postpone any major decisions, and allow him/herself the time to grieve and recover. It is also important to acknowledge and accept your own limitations, and realize that your employee’s situation will be easier with the help of outside resources. A referral to your ParTNer’s EAP may assist him/her in this difficult time.

Getting Help. If you would like more information, you can call your ParTNer’s EAP 800-308-4934 and ask to speak with someone on the Workplace Support Team. The Workplace Support Team is a dedicated group of consultants, ready to help and support leaders with various management issues, including dealing with grief.

Adapted from information on www.nmha.org.