

# FACULTY TIPSHEET

## Supporting Colleagues Through Grief and Loss

Suffering a loss can happen at any time and can have various effects on us. It can negatively impact our ability to return to campus and function effectively in that environment. It can result in changes in our cognitive, emotional, and physical health. It can cause us to leave our jobs or, the opposite, overwork ourselves. As a university community, we have a responsibility to help each other when either we or others are suffering a loss. Knowing how to help ourselves, as well as our faculty and staff colleagues, cope with loss is essential to creating a caring and inclusive university environment. Here are some tips for supporting colleagues through grief and loss.

- 1. Recognize the stages of loss.** Within the first few weeks to months after a loss, individuals may refuse to believe they have lost a loved one, may experience outbursts of anger, have strong feelings of guilt, have feelings of sadness or hopelessness, and may have a heightened sense of fear.
- 2. Be sympathetic and acknowledge the impact of the loss.** Grief can have a significant impact on those around us. It is better to give each other permission to talk about what has happened and its impact than to go on as if nothing had happened. In some instances, it may be helpful to allow time during the day for people to check in and talk about how they are doing.
- 3. Show compassion.** Provide verbal and emotional support. Acknowledge the loss with a kind word or card. If it is the death of a loved one, consider sending flowers or offering to provide a meal.
- 4. Be kind to each other.** People may not be at their best. Be accommodating, gentle, and understanding with one another during this time. Find ways to cooperate and share any additional workload, for example offer to cover a class or team teach a course.
- 5. Establish reasonable and clear performance expectations.** If you have direct reports who have suffered a loss, be thoughtful and deliberate about work assignments. Extend deadlines or reassign work when you can. Be clear about what work assignments need to be completed and when.
- 6. Encourage time off.** Refer colleagues to UNL's bereavement leave policy [go.unl.edu/fbleave](https://go.unl.edu/fbleave) or encourage them to consider a temporary flexible working arrangement [hr.unl.edu/life-events](https://hr.unl.edu/life-events). Provide a safe space for those suffering loss to go when they need to be alone or express private emotions; if needed, consider offering your office as such a safe place.
- 7. Encourage self-care.** We all need self-care and reminding those who are grieving that they can give themselves extra rest, relaxation, exercise, and positive diversions can go a long way.
- 8. Make sure the individual knows about additional help.** As faculty we like to analyze and solve problems, but not everyone who is grieving a loss needs that kind of help. If they do, however, point them to the resources for faculty and staff through the Employee Assistance Program [hr.unl.edu/eap](https://hr.unl.edu/eap).

## RESOURCES

- The Potential Impact of Bereavement Grief on Workers, Work, Careers, and the Workplace by Donna M. Wilson, Andrea Rodríguez-Prat, and Gail Low [go.unl.edu/griefimpact](https://go.unl.edu/griefimpact)
- Grieving in the Workplace: How do Grieving Employees Perceive their Experience of Workplace Support from Management? by Leanne Flux, Alex Hassett, and Margie Callanan [go.unl.edu/workplacegrief](https://go.unl.edu/workplacegrief)
- Bereavement Experiences of Mothers and Fathers Over Time after the Death of a Child Due to Cancer by Rifat Alam, Maru Barrera, Norma D'Agostino, David B. Nicholas, and Gerald Schneiderman [go.unl.edu/griefexperience](https://go.unl.edu/griefexperience)

