

# Supporting a co-worker with a serious illness

Work, and the people we work with, are an important part of our daily lives. When we hear that a co-worker has a serious illness, it can bring about feelings of shock and sadness, and have a significant effect on the workplace.

It is important to remember that your co-worker is coming to terms with their illness and may be grieving as a result of it.

## How you can be supportive

- Reach out, let them know you care and that you recognize this is a difficult time for them. When someone is seriously ill, isolating and withdrawing is common for us, as well as the person who is ill. Serious illnesses can force us to look at our own fears about illness, physical decline, and even death.
- Ask them how you can help them. Be specific and ask what you can do to help vs. telling them to call you if they need help.
- Treat them as normally as possible. Include them in all meetings, memos and social activities as you did prior to their illness.
- Respect their desire for privacy.
- Be aware of physical changes that may occur, and how that may affect their ability to perform at work.
- Be mindful that there may be an increase in absences or a need for schedule adjustments. During those times, you can offer to provide transportation, prepare meals, donate sick or vacation time, or offer to do some of their work.
- If the person needs to take a leave of absence, ask if a point person can be assigned to relay information about the co-worker to the team, coordinate visits and communications, and keep them in the loop on business news.

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