

PREPARED FOR

Manas – Center for Mental Wellness & Counselling

Supporting Employees Through Bereavement and Loss

A Manager's Compassionate Response Guide

Presented by Dr. Priya Dubey Sharma

Manas – Center for Mental Wellness & Counselling

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Programme Overview

This programme equips managers and HR professionals with the understanding and tools to support employees experiencing personal loss. Recognizing that grief impacts productivity for extended periods, this session offers practical, evidence-based strategies for compassionate workplace support.

Learning Objectives

- ✔ Understand the diverse forms of loss employees may face beyond death, such as divorce or health challenges, and how these experiences can affect their work lives.
- ✔ Learn effective communication techniques, including what to say and what to avoid, to offer genuine support during times of grief.
- ✔ Explore the role of flexible work arrangements and bereavement policies in fostering a supportive environment for grieving employees.
- ✔ Develop strategies for facilitating a sensitive and dignified reintegration of employees returning to work after a period of loss.
- ✔ Identify signs of complicated grief and understand when and how to guide employees towards professional mental wellness resources.
- ✔ Integrate cultural nuances of Indian bereavement customs into workplace support practices for greater sensitivity and effectiveness.

WHO SHOULD ATTEND

This programme is designed for all people managers and HR professionals seeking to enhance their capacity for supporting employees through personal loss.

Programme Content

1. Understanding the Spectrum of Loss

Employees experience a wide range of losses, not limited to the death of a loved one. This includes significant life events such as divorce, miscarriage, the loss of a cherished pet, or receiving a serious health diagnosis. Each of these events can profoundly impact an individual's emotional state, focus, and overall well-being, consequently affecting their performance at work.

Understanding this broader spectrum allows managers to offer more appropriate and empathetic support, recognizing that grief is a multifaceted human experience.

 **Activity:** Group discussion on types of loss witnessed in the workplace.

2. Empathetic Communication: What to Say and What Not to Say

Effective communication is crucial when supporting a grieving colleague. This section provides practical guidance on empathetic language, offering comfort without platitudes, and actively listening. We will explore phrases that convey genuine care and avoid minimizing the employee's pain, such as 'I'm so sorry for your loss' versus 'Everything happens for a reason.' Learning to navigate these conversations with sensitivity can make a significant difference in an employee's sense of being supported and understood during their difficult time.

 **Activity:** Role-playing common difficult conversations.

3. Flexible Work and Supportive Policies

Implementing flexible work arrangements and clear bereavement policies demonstrates a commitment to employee well-being. This session will discuss how options like adjusted hours, remote work, or temporary leave can provide much-needed space for employees to process their grief. We will also examine the importance of a well-defined bereavement policy that outlines entitlements and support mechanisms, ensuring consistency and fairness across the organization.

 **Activity:** Review of sample bereavement policy clauses.

4. Reintegration with Dignity: Returning to Work

The return to work after a period of absence due to loss requires careful consideration and support. This module focuses on strategies to facilitate a smooth and dignified reintegration, ensuring the employee feels valued and not overwhelmed. We will explore phased returns, adjusted workloads, and the importance of checking in regularly, creating a safe space for them to gradually resume their responsibilities while continuing their healing process.

 **Activity: Brainstorming reintegration strategies for different scenarios.**

5. Recognizing and Responding to Complicated Grief

While grief is a natural response, some individuals may experience prolonged or complicated grief reactions that interfere significantly with their daily functioning. This section will help managers identify potential indicators of such prolonged distress, such as persistent intense sadness, difficulty engaging in life, or a pervasive sense of hopelessness. Understanding these signs is vital for knowing when to encourage an employee to seek professional mental wellness support.

 **Activity: Case study analysis of grief responses.**

6. Cultural Sensitivity in Indian Bereavement Practices

India's diverse cultural landscape encompasses a variety of traditions and customs surrounding loss and mourning. This session will explore common Indian bereavement practices and how managers can approach these with sensitivity and respect. Understanding these cultural nuances helps in offering support that aligns with the employee's personal and familial traditions, fostering a more inclusive and understanding workplace environment during their time of sorrow.

 **Activity: Sharing insights on cultural practices related to loss.**

Action Plan

Concrete steps for implementation.

Action	Owner	Timeline	Notes
Communicate updated bereavement policy to all employees.	HR	Week 1	Ensure policy is easily accessible on the company intranet and highlights key support provisions.
Schedule mandatory training for all people managers on supporting employees through loss.	HR/Learning & Development	Month 1	Utilize the content from this programme to design and deliver interactive training sessions.
Develop a resource list of external mental wellness professionals and services.	HR	Week 2	Compile a confidential list of reputable counsellors and support groups familiar with grief and loss.
Review and update existing flexible work arrangement guidelines.	HR/Operations	Month 1	Clarify eligibility criteria and application processes for temporary flexible work options.
Implement a confidential check-in process for employees returning after bereavement leave.	Manager	Month 2	Managers to initiate brief, supportive conversations to gauge employee well-being and workload adjustment needs.
Integrate modules on loss and grief support into new manager onboarding.	HR/Learning & Development	Quarter 1	Ensure all new managers receive foundational training on empathetic leadership and support strategies from the outset.

About Manas



Dr. Priya Dubey Sharma

Founder & Consulting Psychologist | Applied, Organizational & Behavioural Psychologist | PhD | 18+ Years

Dr. Priya Dubey Sharma brings 18+ years of applied psychology to corporate wellness. She has worked with SBI, educational institutions, and corporate teams across India. Her evidence-based approach combines CBT, mindfulness, and culturally contextualised psychology for measurable outcomes. She is the creator of the Performance FOMO Index™ and the High-Functioning Distress Framework™.

Manas – Center for Mental Wellness & Counselling

A MSME-registered organisation dedicated to evidence-based mental wellness.

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