

# HR Insights

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## Managing Grieving Employees

Grief is a natural reaction to the loss of a loved one. The side effects are well-known, including intense sadness, depression and irritability—just to name a few. When employees are grieving, it can be difficult for them to focus on anything other than their loss. In fact, the Grief Recovery Institute found that grieving workers cost employers between \$75 billion and \$100 billion annually through lost productivity and absenteeism. That's not surprising, given that 85% of workers said grief affects their decision-making capabilities and productivity levels, according to the same report.

### Why Grief Matters Right Now

Employee grief may seem low on the list of pressing workplace concerns amid the coronavirus pandemic, but ignoring this issue can actually hinder return-to-work efforts. That's because nearly 57% of individuals are grieving the loss of someone within the past three years, according to a recent WebMD study. Following a swath of coronavirus-related deaths, this figure has likely compounded.

If the vast majority of employees say grief affects their workplace performance and over half of the population is currently grieving, it's easy to see why employers can't ignore this issue.

## What Employers Can Do

It's important for employers to consider employee mental health—including grief—when developing their return-to-work strategies following the coronavirus pandemic. Even if an employer was fortunate enough to maintain operations during the nationwide closures, their employees may still be grieving.

Just like there are many ways to grieve, there are many ways employers can help their grieving employees. Here are a few examples:

- Offering paid time off specifically for bereavement
- Providing grief counseling in addition to time off
- Partnering with vendors who specialize in managing grief or end-of-life planning
- Expanding health and mental health benefits to include more grief support
- Allowing grieving employees to work reduced hours

Employers should consider surveying employees to identify areas of improvement when it comes to how their workplace supports grief and other mental health issues.

Speak with NYSIF to discuss solutions that can work for your unique circumstances.



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