**NHS Education for Scotland**

**Transcript of ‘Supporting teams in responding to the sudden death of a colleague: Looking after yourself and others’ video**

The news of the sudden or unexpected death of a colleague can be shocking, distressing and destabilising for those who knew and worked with them. Emotional reactions to hearing the news may have an impact on our wellbeing and ability to function, no matter what our role is. We may find it difficult to maintain focus and be productive. Most of us will recover our ability to function in a short time, provided we have space, feel supported and are able to be compassionate towards ourselves.

Grief is a normal reaction to a painful event such as the death of a colleague. It’s known that the grieving process isn’t necessarily linear, and we may not feel that it’s orderly or organised. It may affect all aspects of our wellbeing which can be physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual. Although grief can be a shared experience, it’s as unique and individual as we are. We’ll each be affected in our own way and that will reflect our relationship with the person who has died as well as our own past experiences of bereavement and how we have responded.

There may be features about the sudden death that also make it particularly shocking for some, especially if we have known them for some time or if they remind us of someone we care about. Depending on the nature of the sudden death, it may be helpful to think about any unique support that should be made available for the particular situation. In the circumstance of a suspected death by suicide, suicide postvention refers to the actions taken within an organisation to provide support in an effective and sensitive way. Postvention guidelines can help us recover by enabling timely and appropriate support to be put in place.

Knowing how to respond in a meaningful and compassionate way can seem overwhelming. There may be differences in how we engage with one another and for those of us in leadership roles, we may need to consider how we continue to be visible throughout. Each of us may find different things helpful, however a good place to begin is with listening. Listening is all about our humanity, our empathy and our curiosity about what is really going on for each of us and it enables us to embrace kindness and humility. Opportunities to talk over what has happened and express feelings of sadness or guilt with a trusted person, for example, the healthcare chaplain, who can listen without judgement can assist with the recovery process. Although it may be difficult to start with, speaking with someone we can trust can make all the difference.

The emotional effort needed when we are required to behave professionally after experiencing trauma can be exhausting and intensify grief reactions. We may struggle to be self-compassionate and often find it easier to comfort others than attend to our own emotional needs. We need to ensure we offer kindness to each other to take care of ourselves.

One way of dealing with our feelings in a self-compassionate way is to consider the acronym RAIN. Recognise, what is happening for us in this moment and being present with our feelings. Allow or Accepting, whatever is happening, all of the thoughts, feelings, sensations, and emotions, just as they are. Investigate, being curious about what the feelings, emotions and thoughts truly represent. Nurture, with self-compassion. When we create an attitude of acceptance, care, and love towards ourselves, we can prioritise our own recovery.

Some people may find it helpful to have opportunities to talk about and remember the person who has died. Planning memorial activities can be a source of comfort and may help us to gather a sense of meaning from their work and life. We will each experience the sudden death of a colleague differently. It may be long lasting and affect every part of our lives and work. Mutual support alongside one another, listening to each other and being self-compassionate may help us all to recover and heal from the death.

The film was produced in June 2024 and can be found at [www.sad.scot.nhs.uk](http://www.sad.scot.nhs.uk/) or <https://vimeo.com/986440644>

For more information visit [www.sad.scot.nhs.uk](http://www.sad.scot.nhs.uk/) or contact supportarounddeath@nes.scot.nhs.uk

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