

Multiculturalism & Grief

From: http://www.compassionatwork.com/art_cultural.html

- In some Native American cultures, such as the Navaho nation, the name of the deceased is not mentioned. The same is true for some Aboriginal clans. Don't assume that invoking the names and pictures of the deceased are always culturally appropriate. Some cultures honor the dead in non-verbal ways.

Suggestion: Don't ask too many personal questions. Take your cue from how much a person shares with you. Be thoughtful with your words or lack of words.

- When co-workers attend a Japanese American funeral, it is customary to offer a "Koden"—a monetary offering that is given to the family in an envelope upon your arrival to the funeral or memorial service. The amount of "Koden" often is determined by how much money one has received in similar circumstances from the deceased or their family (if they know them).

Suggestion: Offer cultural information about appropriate obituary gifts.

- If you're invited to a Buddhist funeral or memorial service/reception, gifts of vegetarian food are appreciated. There will usually be an incense ceremony. One needn't feel obligated to participate. It is OK to sit quietly and observe the ritual.

Suggestion: Do only what feels comfortable in a new social/cultural situation.

- In Mexican-American cultures, individuals celebrate the Days of the Dead, known in Spanish as Dias de los Muertos. It occurs on All Saints Day (November 1) and All Soul's Day (November 2). According to popular belief, the deceased have divine permission to visit friends and relatives on earth, and to share the pleasures of the living. Portrayed with affection and humor by artists, bakers and craftworkers, these cemetery and community celebrations shed a different attitude toward the loss of a loved one.

Suggestion: Borrowing from Mexican-American culture, employees can create a temporary workplace altar to remember a fellow worker/s who may have died. Or you can encourage individuals to attend the myriad public celebrations that take place in major urban areas where there's a large Mexican-American population.

- In the Jewish religion, the anniversary of a death has a special name: *yahrzeit*, the Yiddish word for "year time." For the family, it is a time to gather at a synagogue, to "recall" the individual. On the first anniversary, in particular, family members visit the cemetery, where they might dedicate the tombstone with prayers and brief remarks.

Suggestion: Employers may want to add a special field in the personnel files to record significant dates for their employees. A card or e-mail that encourages the employee to take the day off would be greatly appreciated.

- If you attend an Islamic funeral service, dress modestly, although black is not typically required. Women will be expected to cover their heads and the length of their arms. If the service is performed in a mosque, shoes aren't allowed. There will either be a designated area to leave the shoes or be given a plastic bag in which to carry them. Also, in many instances, only men may attend the burial.

Suggestion: Inform supportive co-workers of an Islamic employee that they may encounter some gender-specific mourning rituals.

From Rosenblatt (1993):

Northern Brazil: Infant and child deaths seen as inevitable and therefore not mourned.

Bali: Mourners try to remain calm while grieving because the Balinese do not want to agitate the gods whom they worship.

In contrast:

Cairo: People often mourn for years, often in a depressed, especially following the loss of a child.

China: Many Chinese people experience their grief in physical ways.

Papua New Guinea: Men of the Kaluli culture frequently experience their mourning through anger and sometimes violent revenge.