



Leanne Faraday-Brash

# How do I grieve alone?

**G**rief is an individual experience, no matter what the circumstances of death in the workplace. When a person dies at work and their body is recovered, they can be laid to rest. Whether it is in a cemetery or through cremation, family, friends and colleagues will be able to start the long and sad process of “picking up the pieces and moving forward”, organisational psychologist Leanne Faraday-Brash says.

There should be no expectation, however, of people ‘getting over’ the death, moving forward at the same pace or forgetting their loved ones or colleagues, Faraday-Brash adds.

If there is no body, however, there is no opportunity to lay the person to rest and picking up the pieces may be more difficult. There is “no physical place to go to connect with the person, no place to experience the emotion”, Faraday-Brash says.

Nor is there the same opportunity to ‘quarantine’ the grief as for those who have been able to lay their loved one to rest. “You can’t get in the car drive away from a cemetery and compartmentalise your grief,” Faraday-Brash says.

However, no matter how someone dies and whether or not their bodies are recovered, the overarching view is that no two individuals will experience the same grief feelings or will respond in the same manner.

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## Validation

At work, as in other circumstances, each employee’s grief needs to be respected and validated. “Some people may cry or crack a joke – or some may be seen by others as not sufficiently sad enough, which can create it’s own workplace tensions,” Faraday-Brash says.

The reality is that each employee will experience and express grief differently – and each employee will have had a different level of closeness with the person who has died.

It’s a leader’s job to normalise that people will grieve in different ways, she adds.



Importantly, time off work may not be the answer. In fact, time off from work shouldn’t be encouraged for people who don’t have support systems set up at home, Faraday-Brash says, because they may not fare well at home alone dwelling on their grief.

The workplace should also make contact with the family of the deceased employee. The workplace should pay their respects, and ask the family how they would

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like the workplace to interact with them, and to respect the family's wishes, she says, if the workplace wishes to commemorate the deceased in some way.

#### **Difficult decision**

"But as sad as people may feel at work there is still a job to do," Faraday-Brash says. While leaders need to be respectful and allow for the grieving process, they also need to ensure work is completed.

Leaders also need to ensure memory traces in the workplace are handled appropriately. While one needs to be respectful over the 'empty desk' – it may not be practical or sensible for it to remain empty forever.

That being said, leaders should not make "one shot offers of help" to employees, Faraday-Brash says. A person may not want to take up the offer immediately,

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but down the track they may change their mind. EAP, critical incident debriefing and other types of intervention should be made available as necessary, she adds.

In providing assistance, leaders should also ensure their EEO policies and procedures are robust and employees' religious views are respected.

**Leanne Faraday-Brash is the principal consultant at Brash Consulting, a provider of people support services. For more details, visit [www.brashconsulting.com.au](http://www.brashconsulting.com.au) or phone 03 9505 3070.**

## The Heartache of No Goodbye

### **Joy Moon shares her experience since her son was killed at work**

On March 25th 2003 my son, Darren Moon, was killed at work. He was 29 years old and had worked at Amcor Fairfield Mill for just three years. The Paper Making Machine he was working on was not guarded and Darren was pulled into the huge rollers and crushed to death.

My husband Paul was also an Amcor employee but was on leave. We got a phone call and Paul rushed straight into work to find our son Darren laying on the floor with the paramedics working on him. Paul yelled at Darren to get up, and then looked at the paramedics, but they shook their heads. Our son was brain dead.

Paul then sat down beside Darren and picked him up onto his knee and cradled him, closed his eyes and said goodbye. That is what Paul lives with every day and he will never work again. After they took Darren's body away Paul came home to tell me and our eldest child, Jamin, what had happened but as he walked in I could tell just by the look on his face. I will never forget that look. I just yelled "Don't tell me that" – I then told Paul I needed to see Darren. I desperately wanted to hold him, rock him, tell him everything was going to be alright, stroke his forehead, tell him I loved him and say goodbye. I did not get that chance.

At the time I could not explain to anyone how I felt and

what I needed to do. Our family doctor arrived and I was given a needle to settle me down, which was for the best now that I look back on it. Our two daughters arrived home, one older and one younger than Darren. Like Jamin, they were very shocked and angry at what had happened to their brother. They also told me that it was best not to see Darren. I was too numb to even think.

It is now coming up to eight years since Darren was killed – I do not feel any better about not seeing him, in fact it haunts me every day. I get these visions of how he looked and thoughts of 'Did he need me to be with him? Did he call out for me? Did he hate me?' for not being there, and sharing those last moments of his life with Paul. We were together at our son's birth; we should have been together at his death. I feel so guilty and so sad that I was not there to help Paul go through our son's death. Paul was there alone and I should have been with him.

The grief of losing a child is devastating and on top of that not being able to say goodbye is overwhelming and something I know I will never come to terms with.

**The Moon family is supported by IDSA Inc. (Industrial Deaths Support and Advocacy) a not-for-profit Incorporated Association providing free support and assistance to family and workmates affected by a workplace death. For more details, visit [www.idsa.com.au](http://www.idsa.com.au) or phone 03 96543353.**