

Open Dialogue*

The effects of being exposed to fatalities should be a welcome and well-supported topic of discussion throughout your workplace culture. Whether sharing takes place in one-on-one conversations or among small groups of peers, whether it is informal or is a structured part of a meeting agenda, and whether supervisors are involved or not, opportunities for staff to discuss their experiences openly can be extremely helpful. Consider the following as you promote and support dialogue about grief, trauma, and loss:

- An essential requirement for all conversation is a safe space where people's vulnerability, privacy, and confidentiality are protected.
- It is important to dispense only accurate factual information about any individual incident and about the epidemic overall.
- People should not be put in a position where they feel compelled to share about their feelings or experiences.
- The role of listeners, yourself included, should be primarily to listen—not to make judgments, give advice, or elicit details about what happened.
- Questions or guided facilitation may be appropriate if they focus generally on issues such as:
 - What meaning people's experiences hold for them
 - How their experiences are shaped by their motivation or purpose for doing the work they do
- People should be validated for sharing all aspects of how they are doing, so they don't feel confined to sharing only "positive" information: for example, they should be welcomed to talk about:
 - What is helping them cope and what they feel unable to cope with
 - What gives them hope and what they feel hopeless about
- Peer-to-peer support focused on coping with grief, trauma, and loss has high value so consider:
 - Dedicated time set aside for small group sharing on topics related to grief, loss, and trauma
 - A buddy system that pairs individuals with a partner for mutual help. Partners should focus on actions such as:
 - Listening to each other's experiences
 - Understanding each other's perspective
 - Helping each other speak up about needs and limitations
 - Encouraging each other with self-care and stress relief
 - Recognizing challenges and accomplishments
 - Acknowledging tough situations and the need for help

*Excerpted with permission from *Coping with Overdose Fatalities: Tools for Public Health Workers*, Massachusetts Bureau of Substance Addiction Services. Downloaded at bit.ly/odfatalities.