

# BC3's "Grief in the Workplace" session to enlighten employers, presenter says

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Kelli Connolly will discuss time frames associated with an employee's grief, performance expectations and emotional triggers during her "Grief in the Workplace" presentation Feb. 6 as part of Butler County Community College's Lunch & Learn Series. Connolly is shown Tuesday, Jan. 8, 2019, at Lutheran SeniorLife VNA Hospice, Butler, where she serves as bereavement coordinator.

(Butler, PA) A bereavement coordinator who says her first "Grief in the Workplace" presentation in August led attendees to wonder why the topic isn't included in general employer education will address an employee's common reactions following the death of a loved one, and supervisor and colleague do's and don'ts, during Butler County Community College's Lunch & Learn Series session Feb. 6.

Kelli Connolly, who has counseled hundreds of mourners through Lutheran SeniorLife VNA Hospice, will also discuss at ConnectWork on Main, 220 S. Main St., Suite 201, Butler, time

frames associated with an employee's grief, performance expectations, emotional triggers and how supervisors and co-workers can help.

"Grief in the Workplace" is the second of six Lunch & Learn professional skills workshops to be held in downtown Butler locations through June as part of the first open programming in the city by BC3's Workforce Development division.

The 90-minute Lunch & Learn begins at 11:30 a.m. with a chance to network, followed by a light lunch catered by Upper Crust Shop on Main and Connolly's presentation.

Butler County Health Care Consortium members who attended Connolly's Aug. 1 presentation said "Wow, I didn't know this. I wish I would have known this sooner. Why isn't this part of general employer education?" said Connolly, who earned a bachelor's degree in psychology from the University of Pittsburgh in 1994, has worked in hospice for 12 years and is a certified grief recovery specialist.

## Performing at pre-loss level difficult

It is more likely than not that employees will exhibit signs of confusion, forgetfulness, anxiety, tearfulness or other reactions after the death of a loved one, Connolly said, adding that their condition can be aggravated by an employer who hasn't experienced a significant loss.

"People tell me all the time it feels like being in a fog," Connolly said. "If you can imagine that, and then trying to go back to work, and have your employer feel as though you should perform at your pre-loss level, that adds so much stress to their situation, because they are upset with themselves for not being capable of performing at that level. For not being able to concentrate. For constantly having thoughts of their loved one ahead of everything else, which is very normal.

"It can also be very difficult to concentrate, do their work and control their emotions. The beginning of grief is plagued by emotions that come in tidal wave form. You may be sitting at your desk and a song comes on the overhead radio system and it was your loved one's favorite song. And that is it, you are a bucket of tears."

Employers must be aware that productivity may temporarily decrease, Connolly said. Employees can acknowledge they are experiencing a difficult time and request a temporary reduction in responsibilities or a shortened workday, Connolly said.

"It really is important that employers understand what that employee may be going through," Connolly said, "and be able to work with them until they are starting to heal."

"A lot of people just don't address it"

BC3's "Grief in the Workplace" theme is unique in that it focuses on a subject not normally included in a professional skills workshop, said Kelly McKissick, BC3's coordinator of professional education and certificate programs.

"But it's beneficial because it's a topic a lot of people don't talk about," McKissick said. "A lot of people just don't address it. But there may be someone who you are working next to, who you are working with, who has just lost someone.

"You think work is just work, but everybody's lives somehow interact with work. It's important for people to know how to respond when these life events occur. You can't just get back and function the way you did. Your life has totally changed. You need to have at least one person there who knows how to respond in a way that can help you to function."

BC3's Lunch & Learn Series follows the realization of 2017-2022 strategic plan initiatives that include the creation of a coordinator of community leadership initiatives position and, by moving that office in August to a South Main Street location, establishing BC3's first presence in the city of Butler. The college in 2018 also launched "Reset Your Brain: A Revolutionary Approach to Opioid Addiction & Recovery," whose three monthlong "Hope is Dope" programs in 2018 were held in downtown Butler.

"I am sensitive right now to Butler and to the city in that we have so many losses due to the overdoses," Connolly said. "I feel like it has been a very difficult two-year period in this area. So I feel now more than ever we need to be educated and aware of what so many people in our community are dealing with on a grief level.

"I am so thankful that BC3 is coordinating this effort because I feel that it certainly strengthens our community. It strengthens our knowledge base. It strengthens our compassion. It strengthens our ability to reach out to those who are grieving. For employers to know how to help their employees really creates a better working environment in the city in general. I think this is a banner idea for BC3."

## Lunch & Learn Series sessions on tap through June

Four additional Lunch & Learn Series sessions are scheduled this spring, including "Outside the Box-Creative Thinking Seminar" on March 29 at the Butler Public Library.

Christopher Yco, an instructor with BC3's Workforce Development division, will discuss "Goal Setting" during an April 17 Lunch & Learn at The Grand Ballroom.

Kiley Cribbs, BC3's coordinator of EMS and police training programs, will educate participants on the signs and symptoms of a person in cardiac arrest and in need of CPR, and the management of the first few minutes of a cardiac emergency, in "Hands-Only CPR – Save a Life," scheduled for May 22 at Springhill Suites by Marriott.

Tricia Pritchard, a BC3 faculty member, will help participants develop listening practices that will help them influence others, reduce conflict and increase productivity in “Active Listening” on June 12 at The Chop Shop.

The cost for each Lunch & Learn will be \$10 per person. Seating is limited, and registration is required. To register, visit [bc3.edu/lunch-learn](http://bc3.edu/lunch-learn) or call 724-287-8711, Ext. 8476 for corporate billing. Lunch & Learn participants interested in additional information or training on the topics can contact BC3’s Workforce Development division, McKissick said.