



HUMAN RESOURCES AND LABOR RELATIONS DEPARTMENT

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To: County Staff

From: Andrew S. McKinnon, Director
Human Resources and Labor Relations

Date: January 19, 2022

Re: Andrea Szalkowski



We dread sending these notices, especially now as there is already so much strife and sadness in the world. However, I regret to inform you that Macomb County has lost a dear friend, colleague and co-worker. More importantly a family has lost a mother, wife, sister and more, Andrea Szalkowski.

Many of you may have known Andrea as a teacher in the Head Start Program, others of you may have known her as the wife of Deputy Anthony Szalkowski, still others of you may have known her as the Sister of Sheila Cote' at the Office of Senior Services. From what you will read shortly, she probably liked to mostly be known as Marc, Andrew, Anna Kate, and Danny's mom. That's a lot of reach for someone who was far too young to pass, not to mention the hundreds and likely thousands of little lives she touched as a teacher for over 25 years.

Andrea's sister Sheila authored the following tribute to her:

We are devastated by the loss of our kind, loving, gentle Andrea. She was my lifelong friend and I cannot imagine what life will be like without her.

Andrea loved children and teaching was her life passion. She would often share stories of cute things her students said or did. She truly found joy in her work with children. She provided security and nurturing to those children who were struggling with behavior issues or an unstable home environment. Her impact in the lives of children she taught was far-reaching and beyond the confinement of the classroom. Andrea cared a great deal for her co-workers and developed friendships with them over the years.

She devoted her life to her family. She married her high school sweetheart, Tony. They enjoyed an active life together centered around their children. She was an incredible mother and raised 4 of the most amazing children-Marc, Andrew, Anna Kate and Danny. They are a symbol of her kindness, compassion, wisdom and love – a living message she has left for us.

What kind, sweet and loving words. If anyone ever wrote about me the way that Sheila wrote about her niece and nephews, I don't think I could speak for days without choking up. Andrea clearly left her mark and such a loss will be felt deeply and for a long time. Funeral arrangements can be found by clicking [here](#)

Please keep Anthony, Marc, Andrew, Anna Kate, Danny, Sheila and their extended family and friends in your thoughts and prayers. Please also remember that we provide confidential no-cost support through our Employee Assistance Program ("EAP") and it can be accessed by dialing 1-888-333-6269. Additional EAP information is also attached below.

I hope you all have a safe and peaceful rest of your week.

What We Need During Grief

Time

Take time to lament and time with others whom you trust and who will listen when you need to talk. Give yourself time to understand the feelings that go along with loss without judging yourself.

Hope

You may find hope and comfort from those who have experienced a similar loss. Finding out some things that helped others and realizing that they have recovered may give you hope that sometime in the future your grief will be less raw and painful as well.

Caring

Try to allow yourself to accept the caring expressions from others, even if it seems uneasy at first. By helping a friend or relative also suffering the same loss may bring a feeling of closeness with that person.

Goals

Depending on the severity of the incident you've experienced, you may feel like life has no exact purpose. At times like these, small goals to live by are helpful. Something to look forward to is a good start, like grabbing coffee with a friend tonight, a movie next week, and a weekend trip next month to help you get through the time in the immediate future. At first, don't be surprised if your enjoyment of these things is lessened. This is normal and will pass as your hardship mends.

Small Pleasures

Do not underestimate the healing effects of small pleasures as you are ready. Sunsets, a walk in the woods, journaling your thoughts, sharing a favorite food — all of these are small steps toward regaining your pleasure in life itself.

Permission to Backslide

Sometimes after a period of feeling good, we find ourselves back in the feelings of extreme sadness, despair, or anger. This is often the nature of grief, up and down, and it may happen over and over for a time. It happens because, as humans, we cannot take in all of the pain and the meaning of death at once. So we let it in a little at a time.

Help

Remember you may be a rookie at the grief experience you're going through. This may be the first loss of someone close to you. You're new at this, and you're not sure what to do. As with any new skill, sometimes it's nice to have some help, a friend or counselor with whom to talk.

Source: Maryann Harter Danson, R.N., M.S., Hilltop Hospice, Grand Junction, Colorado

How to Help Those You Care About

If someone you care about has been exposed to a traumatic incident, they may experience some noticeable changes in their health, thinking, emotions, and behavior. These are normal reactions that people have to an abnormal event. The following are some ways in which you can be supportive during this time:

- Warmly encourage them to talk to you about how he or she is feeling.
- Never assume that men handle this kind of trauma better than women — grief knows no bounds when it comes to gender.
- Remind the person that his or her confusing emotions are normal.
- Do not attempt to impose your explanation on why this event has occurred.
- Tell your friends and family how you are feeling. Even if you are not a direct person involved in the trauma remember that people who care about those involved in trauma often become allies.
- Report to friends or family any unusual physical symptoms that might be interfering with that individual's daily routine.
- Don't be afraid to encourage a person to ask for help, including professional counseling, if necessary. And don't be afraid to ask for help yourself, even if you are not directly involved.
- Try not to project your own feelings on those around you. Each individual will experience trauma and its consequences differently. Be understanding to the pace at which each person copes and heals, and don't make a schedule by which a person should recover.
- Do not ask for details of the trauma. If the person wants to talk, listen. The best thing to do is to let the person know that you are there and that you care. It is not necessary to try to make things better.
- Spend time with your loved one, but also allow them some private time.
- Touch is very important for recovery. Offer a hug, an arm around the shoulder, or a pat on the hand.
- Help with everyday tasks. Grabbing some groceries, bringing over a meal, or offering to help with children so they can rest are just a few ways you can be there during this time.
- Offer to go on a walk or to exercise together. Encourage healthy choices with nutrition and encourage your loved one to get a full eight hours of sleep each night.
- Try not to take personally what may seem like anger or other negative feelings.
- If stress symptoms persist without improvement for longer than four weeks, encourage your loved one to seek professional assistance.



Ulliance provides no cost, confidential, short term counseling
for you & your family.

Call us- we're here to help **800.448.8326**