



EMPLOYEE
**EMOTIONAL &
MENTAL HEALTH
AWARENESS**

RESOURCE GUIDE

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Employees are the greatest assets and resources to any organization. Managers and supervisors should be able to guide employees to emotional and mental health resources during and after work assignments that test employees coping ability.

More and longer duration wildfire events and other natural disaster events can compromise the work /

life balance of employees assigned to these events. The inherent danger and risk associated with wildland fire work and response and recovery efforts with all-hazard incidents can expose employees to conditions and circumstances outside their normal training. Sometimes these traumatic experiences can impact their normal coping ability.

Front line responders are not the only employees subject to stressful events and situations. Many employees in support roles, during response, also find times when they are challenged with their coping ability and need support as well.

This guide has been developed to provide resources, tips, and tools that supervisors and employees can use to assist themselves and others when the normal coping ability has been challenged. Hopefully, the guide can help employees on a path to return to a normal lifestyle.

Grief & Grieving

Understanding, Coping, Healing

Grief is a universal human experience, yet it is one of the most challenging emotions to navigate. It is an intricate emotional process that occurs in response to loss, and it can have a profound impact on an individual's life. In this article (WFFF), we will explore what grieving is, its impact on individuals, the grieving process, physical and emotional symptoms, the consequences of avoiding grief, the non-linear nature of grief, common triggers, stages of grief, and resources available for support.

What is Grief?

Grief is the natural and often painful response to loss, encompassing various emotional, cognitive, physical, and behavioral reactions. While we often associate grief with the death of a loved one, it can also result from other forms of loss such as divorce, job loss, the end of a significant relationship, or a major life change. Even missed events or opportunities can cause us to feel loss. Grief is a deeply personal and unique experience, with no one-size-fits-all approach.



The Impact of Grief on an Individual's Life

Grief can permeate every aspect of an individual's life. It can manifest emotionally as sadness, anger, guilt, confusion, or even relief. Physically, it can lead to symptoms like fatigue, sleep disturbances, headaches, and changes in appetite. Cognitive symptoms often include difficulty concentrating, forgetfulness, and intrusive thoughts about the loss. Behavioral changes may involve withdrawal from social activities, increased alcohol or substance use, and heightened irritability.

Grief in Children, Teens & Young Adults

The primary focus of this resource guide is on adult grief. With that said, it is important to consider the emotional and physical needs of children, teens and young adults who may have experienced loss or dealing with grief. While the adults in their world are feeling grief after a loss, children, teens and young adults may be experiencing grief too. Their world may have been turned upside down. A sibling's room may sit empty, a car they hoped to drive after their sister left for college is sold. A family relocates and they change schools and lose friendships. Their best friend, brother or sister is gone. Mom or Dad is not coming home. These are just a few examples.

Children, teens, and young adults often experience grief in unique ways that may not always align with adult expressions of sorrow. Their understanding of death and loss evolves as they mature, and their coping mechanisms may vary depending on their age and developmental stage. It's crucial for parents and caregivers to create an open and supportive environment where these young individuals can freely express their emotions and ask questions. Organizations like The Dougy Center and Sesame Street in Communities offer valuable resources specifically tailored to help children and teens understand and navigate grief.

Additionally, parents can find support through organizations like the National Alliance for Grieving Children (NAGC), which provides resources and connects families with local grief support programs. Seeking guidance from school counselors or mental health professionals can also be instrumental in assisting young individuals as they process their grief and build resilience for the future.

The Grieving Process

Stages of Grief: An Ongoing Journey

The stages of grief are not always experienced in a specific order, and individuals may revisit certain stages multiple times. It's essential to remember that there is no "right" way to grieve, and everyone's journey is unique.

The grieving process is not a linear path but rather a complex journey that varies for each person. It consists of several stages, as described by psychiatrist Elisabeth Kübler-Ross and David Kessler:

- 1. Denial:** Initially, individuals may struggle to accept the reality of the loss. Denial can serve as a protective mechanism, offering emotional respite.
- 2. Anger:** As the denial fades, anger may surface. This anger is often directed at various targets, including oneself, the person who passed away, or even a higher power.
- 3. Bargaining:** During this stage, individuals may attempt to negotiate with fate, seeking ways to reverse or mitigate the loss. This often involves making promises or setting conditions.
- 4. Depression:** A deep sense of sadness and despair can set in as the full weight of the loss becomes apparent. It's important to note that this is a natural part of the process.
- 5. Acceptance:** In time, many individuals come to accept the reality of the loss. This doesn't mean forgetting or moving on, but rather finding a way to live with the pain and integrate the loss into their lives.

Physical and Emotional Symptoms of Grief

Grief can have profound physical and emotional effects on the body.

Physical symptoms may include:

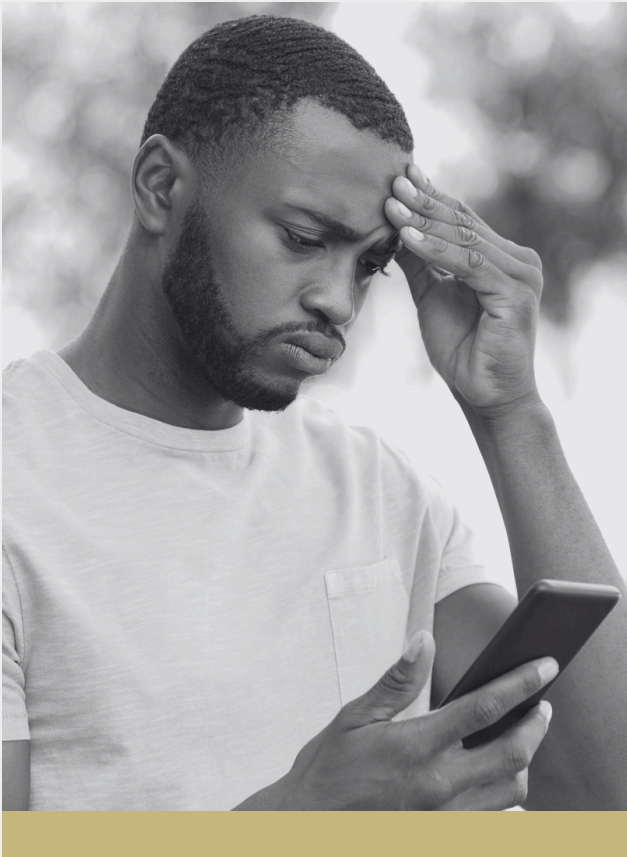
- Fatigue and weakness
- Sleep disturbances, including insomnia or excessive sleeping
- Changes in appetite or weight
- Aches and pains
- Gastrointestinal problems

Emotional symptoms can range from:

- Intense sadness
- Anger and irritability
- Guilt and regret
- Anxiety or panic attacks
- Feelings of numbness or detachment



The Consequences of Avoiding Grief



Some individuals may try to suppress or avoid their grief, believing it will make the pain go away faster. However, avoiding grief can have detrimental consequences. Unresolved grief may lead to prolonged emotional suffering, increased risk of depression and anxiety, strained relationships, and even physical health issues. Additionally, prolonged and unresolved grief can increase the risk of developing mental health disorders, such as major depressive disorder or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Grief is Non-linear & Comes in Waves

Grief is not a linear process, and it doesn't follow a predictable timeline. Instead, it comes in waves. You may feel fine one moment and overwhelmed the next. This unpredictability can be challenging, but it is a normal part of the grieving process.

Common Triggers:

Grief can be triggered by various factors, including anniversaries, holidays, places, and even certain smells or sounds. These triggers can evoke intense emotions and memories associated with the loss, making it important to acknowledge and cope with them.

Is There a Right Way to Grieve?

There isn't really a right way to grieve as the process is different and unique for each individual. Here are some general strategies that can help individuals navigate the grieving process:

- **Allow Yourself to Grieve:** Acknowledge your feelings and give yourself permission to grieve. Understand that grief is a natural response to loss, and it's okay to feel sadness, anger, guilt, or a range of other emotions. Avoid suppressing your feelings, as this can prolong the healing process.
- **Seek Support:** Lean on your support system, which may include friends, family, support groups, or a therapist. Talking about your grief and sharing your emotions with others can provide comfort and validation.
- **Self-Care:** Take care of your physical and emotional well-being. Ensure you get enough rest, eat nutritious meals, and engage in regular exercise. Engaging in self-care activities you enjoy can provide moments of respite from grief.
- **Create Rituals:** Establishing meaningful rituals or ceremonies to honor your loved one can be therapeutic. Lighting a candle, planting a memorial tree, or creating a memory box are ways to keep the memory alive while allowing space for healing.
- **Express Yourself:** Explore creative outlets to express your emotions. Writing in a journal, creating art, or participating in music therapy can be powerful ways to process grief.

- **Educate Yourself:** Understanding the grieving process and learning about how others have coped can be empowering. Reading books on grief or attending support groups can provide valuable insights and guidance.
- **Practice Mindfulness:** Mindfulness techniques, such as meditation and deep breathing exercises, can help you stay present and manage overwhelming emotions. Mindfulness can provide a sense of calm during difficult moments.
- **Professional Help:** Don't hesitate to seek help from a therapist or counselor experienced in grief if you find it challenging to cope on your own. They can offer guidance and tools to navigate the complexities of grief.
- **Give Yourself Time:** Remember that grief doesn't follow a set timeline. Healing is a gradual process, and there is no "right" amount of time to grieve. Be patient with yourself and allow for your own unique journey.
- **Find Meaning:** Eventually, consider ways to find meaning or purpose in your life after loss. This may involve honoring your loved one's memory through charitable work or embracing new opportunities for personal growth.

Coping with grief is an individualized experience, and what works best may vary from person to person. It's essential to be gentle with yourself and seek help when needed. **Healing takes time, and it's okay to ask for support along the way.**

It Takes the Time it Takes

The time it takes to grieve is highly individual and cannot be neatly defined by a specific timeline. Grief is a complex emotional journey, and its duration varies from person to person. Some people may begin to feel a sense of healing and acceptance in a matter of months, while others may grieve for years.

It's important to recognize that there is no "right" or "wrong" duration for grief. The intensity and duration of grief depend on various factors, including the nature of the loss, the individual's coping mechanisms, and their support system. What's crucial is allowing oneself the time needed to process the emotions and heal at their own pace, without imposing external expectations or judgments about when they should "move on." Grief is a unique and personal experience, and it takes the time it takes.

Grief is a complex and individualized process that can impact every facet of a person's life. Recognizing the non-linear nature of grief, understanding its physical and emotional symptoms, and seeking support when needed are crucial steps in navigating this challenging journey towards healing and acceptance. Remember, it's okay to grieve and seeking help is a sign of strength, not weakness.

Wildland Firefighter Foundation

If you or someone you know is grieving the loss of a wildland firefighter, or dealing with trauma from the field, home life or even from childhood, The [Wildland Firefighter Foundation](#) provides support and resources for wildland firefighters, their families and loved ones affected by these courageous individuals' sacrifices.

Providing Grief Support

How do I Support Someone who is Grieving?

Supporting someone who is grieving requires compassion, patience, and understanding. Here are some ways to provide meaningful support:

- **Listen Actively:** One of the most valuable things you can do is simply be there to listen. Encourage the grieving person to share their feelings and thoughts and resist the urge to offer solutions or advice unless they specifically ask for it. Sometimes, all someone needs are a non-judgmental space to express their emotions.
- **Offer Practical Assistance:** Grief can be mentally and physically exhausting. Offer to help with practical tasks like cooking meals, running errands, or taking care of chores. These small acts of kindness can provide much-needed relief during a challenging time.
- **Respect Their Grieving Process:** Everyone grieves differently, and there is no right or wrong way to do it. Some people may want to talk about their loss, while others may need space and solitude. Respect their choices and pace, allowing them to grieve in their own way.
- **Avoid Clichés and Judgment:** While well-intentioned, phrases like “everything happens for a reason” or “time heals all wounds” can be hurtful. Avoid making judgments about how they should be feeling or how they should be coping. Instead, acknowledge their pain and validate their emotions.



- **Remember Special Dates:** Mark anniversaries or significant dates related to the loss on your calendar. Reach out on these days to offer support and let them know you are thinking of them. It can mean a lot to know that someone remembers and cares.
- **Be Patient and Persistent:** Grief is not a short-lived process, and it may take a long time for the person to start feeling better. Continue offering support and checking in on them, even after the initial shock of the loss has passed.
- **Encourage Professional Help:** If you notice signs of prolonged or severe distress, such as persistent depression, suicidal thoughts, or a complete withdrawal from daily life, encourage the grieving individual to seek professional help. A therapist or counselor experienced in grief can provide valuable guidance and support.

Supporting someone who is grieving involves being present, understanding, and patient. Your presence and willingness to listen can provide comfort and solace during their difficult journey through grief. Remember that there is no timetable for healing, and your ongoing support can make a significant difference in their recovery.

PTSD

Post-traumatic Stress Disorder



Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a mental and behavioral health disorder that develops from a stress reaction that occurs after exposure to an extremely stressful, terrifying, dangerous, shocking, traumatic or life-threatening event. Exposure can be from experiencing the event first hand by being a part of it or witnessing it. While most folks may not develop PTSD, others may have persistent, frightening and uncontrollable thoughts and memories of the event(s), flashbacks, sleep problems such as nightmares, feelings of numbness or detachment, or may be startled easily.

PTSD in severe forms can significantly impair a person's ability to function and perform at home, work or socially. Symptoms may start within the first three months after a traumatic event, but sometimes the symptoms do not occur until years later. Symptoms lasting more than one month can create major problems in social and work situations and affect how well a person gets along with others. Oftentimes, this will create problems for a person in conducting their normal daily tasks. Every person is different in how they respond to emotional and mental stress and PTSD can vary from person to person and symptoms may also change and vary over time.

Causes of PTSD

Post-traumatic stress disorder can develop when you go through, see or learn about an event involving actual or threatened death, serious injury or sexual assault.

Healthcare professionals aren't sure why some people get PTSD. As with most mental health problems, a mix of factors probably causes it, including:

- Inherited features of your personality — often called your temperament.
- The way your brain regulates the chemicals and hormones your body releases in response to stress.
- Inherited mental health risks, such as a family history of anxiety and depression.
- Extremely stressful experiences, as well as the amount and severity of trauma you've gone through in your life.

PTSD Risk Factors

Post-traumatic stress disorder can occur in people of all ages. Individuals are more likely to develop PTSD after a traumatic event if they:

- Have a job that exposes them to traumatic events, such as being in the military or being a first responder.
- Have severe or long-lasting traumatic experiences.
- Were physically injured during the traumatic event.
- Do not have a good support system of family and friends.
- Have blood relatives with mental health problems, including PTSD or depression.
- Have other mental health problems, such as anxiety or depression.
- Have been exposed to other trauma earlier in life, such as childhood abuse.
- Drink too much or misuse drugs.

Complications of PTSD

Post-traumatic stress disorder can impact and disrupt your whole life. Impacts can arise with your job, how well you get along with family members, co-workers, friends and enjoyment of everyday activities and physical health. Other mental health problems may arise such as:

- Thinking about and attempting suicide.
- Depression and anxiety disorders.
- Issues with drugs or alcohol use.



PTSD

Symptoms

PTSD Symptom Groups

Intrusive Memories

Symptoms of intrusive memories may include:

- Upsetting dreams or nightmares about a traumatic event.
- Reliving a traumatic event as if it were happening again, also known as flashbacks.
- Unwanted, distressing memories of a traumatic event that come back over and over again.
- Severe emotional distress or physical reactions to something that reminds you of a traumatic event.

Avoidance

Symptoms of avoidance may include:

- Staying away from places, activities or people that remind you of a traumatic event.
- Trying not to think or talk about a traumatic event.

Negative Changes in Thinking and Mood

Symptoms of negative changes in thinking and mood may include:

- Ongoing negative emotions of fear, blame, guilt, anger or shame.
- Negative thoughts about yourself, other people or the world.
- Having a hard time feeling positive emotions.
- Not being interested in activities you once enjoyed.
- Memory problems, including not remembering important aspects of a traumatic event.
- Feeling detached from family and friends.
- Feeling emotionally numb.

Changes in physical and emotional reactions

Symptoms of changes in physical and emotional reactions, also called arousal symptoms, may include:

- Irritability, angry outbursts or aggressive behavior.
- Always being on guard for danger.
- Self-destructive behavior, such as drinking too much or driving too fast.
- Being easily startled or frightened.
- Trouble sleeping.
- Trouble concentrating.
- Physical reactions, such as sweating, rapid breathing, fast heartbeat or shaking.

Intensity of PTSD Symptoms

Symptoms of PTSD vary overtime in how severe they may be. Symptoms can be more prevalent when someone is generally stressed or comes across reminders of what they experienced and can occur at the same time of the year when the traumatic event happened.

Mitigating Development of PTSD

Fear, anxiety, anger, depression and guilt are common reactions to trauma. Many people may have PTSD-like symptoms at first after surviving a traumatic event. Most people who have experienced a traumatic event do not develop PTSD. The key to preventing stress reactions from getting worse is getting timely help and support which may prevent unusual stress reactions which may worsen and become PTSD. Seek out ways to avoid turning to unhealthy coping methods like alcohol or drugs. Turn to family and friends who will listen and offer comfort, mostly listen to you and your feelings. Many find that faith-based communities are helpful. Consider seeking out a mental health professional for a brief course of therapy.

Treatment & Resources

When to Seek Treatment

If someone is experiencing disturbing thoughts and feelings from a traumatic event for more than a month; especially severe thoughts and feelings then professional healthcare or that of a mental health professional should be sought out. Receiving treatment as soon as possible can help prevent symptoms from becoming worse.

Therapy Treatment Options

- **Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT):** CBT is a type of talk therapy that helps focus on changing negative thought patterns and behaviors.
- **Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT):** DBT is a type of therapy that helps individuals learn skills to manage their emotions and improve their relationships.
- **Internal Family Systems (IFS) Therapy:** IFS is a type of therapy that helps individuals understand and work with their internal “parts,” or different aspects of their personality.
- **Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR):** EMDR is a type of therapy that helps individuals process traumatic experiences and reduce the distress associated with them.

- **Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT):** ACT is a type of therapy that helps individuals develop acceptance and mindfulness skills to manage difficult thoughts and emotions.
- **Psychodynamic Therapy:** Psychodynamic therapy is a type of therapy that focuses on exploring unconscious patterns and conflicts to understand and resolve emotional issues.
- **Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT):** MBCT is a type of therapy that combines CBT techniques with mindfulness practices to reduce stress and improve well-being.
- **Interpersonal Therapy (IPT):** IPT is a type of therapy that focuses on improving interpersonal relationships and addressing social and communication issues.
- **Family Therapy:** Family therapy is a type of therapy that involves working with families to improve communication and resolve conflicts.
- **Group Therapy:** Group therapy involves working with a therapist and a group of peers to address common issues and provide support and feedback.

TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF AND REACH OUT FOR THE SUPPORT YOU DESERVE!

****If you or someone you know are in crisis or in danger of harming themselves or others, please seek immediate help. Please contact any of the following resources to help you in moments of need.**

- **Call 911 or the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255**
- **Dial or Text 988: 24/7 free and confidential support ([988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline](#)) suicide and crisis support hotline.**

Informational Resources

- [Suicide.org](https://www.suicide.org): State by State list of hotline assistance numbers within each State.
- [Crisis Text Line](https://www.crisistextline.com): Free, confidential service available 24/7, please reach out by texting BADGE to 741741.
- [Safe Call Now](https://www.safe-call-now.com): Free crisis referral service available 24/7 for public safety employees, emergency services personnel and their families. Call 877-230-6060 or 206-459-3020.
- [National Volunteer Fire Council Fire / EMS Helpline](https://www.nationalvolunteerfirecouncil.org): Free 24/7 helpline created for first responders by members of the fire service to provide support for the unique needs of firefighters, EMS, first responders and their families. Call 888-731-3473 (FIRE).
- [First Responders Peer Support Network](https://www.firstresponderspeer.com)
- [COPLINE](https://www.copline.com): Free service available 24/7 for law enforcement officers, staffed by retired law enforcement who have been trained in active listening. Call 800-267-5463.
- **IAFF Recovery Lifeline**: 24/7 support at 844-274-5374
- [CPTSD Foundation](https://www.cptsdfoundation.org) (for Complex PTSD and PTSD)
- [National Suicide Prevention](https://www.nationalsuicideprevention.org)
- [National Alliance on Mental Illness \(NAMI\)](https://www.namifirstresponders.com)
- **NAMI Support Line**: 1/800-950-NAMI

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- **Psychology Today**: State listings of mental health professionals and areas of expertise.
 - **Wildland Firefighter Foundation Mental Health Information:**
 - NWCG Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) Desk Reference
 - A Preparedness Guide to Wildland Firefighters and Their Families
 - Everyone Goes Home (Wildland)
 - **National Interagency Wildland Fire and Aviation Critical Incident Stress Management Program**
 - **International Critical Incident Stress Foundation**: Offers a database of all CISM / CISD Teams who are members of their organization and can connect you with a team.
 - **National Fallen Firefighters Foundation**
 - **Western States Fire Managers Health and Wellness Subcommittee**
 - **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration**
 - **National Crisis Response Canines**
 - **Federal Wildland Firefighter Health and Wellbeing Program**
 - **USDA Forest Service Casualty Assistance Program (CAP)**: Provides CAP Information for Interagency Partners
 - **Regional Coordinators**
 - **Dale Snyder**: USFS Region 8 CAP Coordinator and Critical Incident Stress Manager
 - Email: dale.snyder@usda.gov / Cell: (936) 465-5173

- [Responder Support Network](#): Used in the Southeast, based out of Asheville, NC.
- [Counseling Team International](#): Based out of Southern California, has experience responding to multiple large incidents.

Additional Resources

- [REBOOT Recovery – Trauma Healing for Everyone](#): Free 12-week program with resources specific to first responders dealing with stress and trauma. There is a self-paced curriculum and weekly group support calls.
- [Save A Warrior](#): Program for first responders and military veterans dealing with post traumatic stress.
- [Mental Health America](#)
- [Badge2Badge](#): Provides support, support groups and resources for emergency first providers.
- [Responder Strong](#)
- [Veterans Crisis Line](#)
- [IAFF Recovery Center](#)
- [Firefighter Behavioral Health Alliance](#)
- [Permission To Start Dreaming Foundation](#)
- [Fire Service Behavioral Health Management Guide](#)

State Specific Resources

Alabama

- [Alabama First Responder Peer Support](#)
- [Alabama Law Enforcement Agency Peer Support](#)
- [Alabama Non-ALEA Peer Support Member Certification Policy](#)

Arkansas

- [Arkansas Crisis Center](#)

Florida

- [Florida Firefighters Safety and Health Collaborative](#)
- [2nd Alarm Project](#)
- [Mental Health Resources for First Responders](#)

Georgia

- [Georgia Department of Public Safety Peer Support](#)
 - (404) 624-7638
 - For 24 Hour after hour support call (404) 624-6077

Kentucky

- [Kentucky First Responder Peer Support](#)
 - Call 855-659-3377 and request a first-responder peer supporter
- [Kentucky Firefighter Peer Support](#)

Louisiana

- [Southern Law Enforcement Foundation CISM / Peer Support](#)
 - 24/7 contact (225) 715-8975

Mississippi

- [First Responders of Mississippi](#)

North Carolina

- [NC Peer Support Team](#)
- [Office of State Fire Marshal - Behavioral Health Crisis Portal](#)
- *A potential local resource in Raleigh is catherine.kaminski@bia.gov 605-218-0030

Oklahoma

- [No One Fights Alone](#)
- [First Responder Support Services](#)
- [Warrior's Rest Foundation](#)

South Carolina

- [SCFAST](#)

Tennessee

- [Tennessee Peer Support Network](#)

Texas

- [TSAFF Peer Support](#)
 - 1-800 273-8255 Available 24 hours a day

Virginia

- [Virginia Department of Health](#)
 - Accredited CISM-Peer Support Teams
- [Virginia First Responder Support Services](#)

States are encouraged to discuss options for Peer-to-Peer Support, CISM / CISD Teams, and other potential resources that may be available within their State with their State Health Department, State Firefighter / Fire Chief Associations, State Fire Marshal, and State Law Enforcement Agency.

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