



Forestry and
Land Scotland
Coilltearachd agus
Fearann Alba

Bereavement Support



Introduction

The Covid-19 crisis is an unprecedented and difficult time for all. Whilst we know the majority of individuals who contract coronavirus will recover, people may experience bereavement of family and friends under very testing and difficult personal and isolating circumstances. We may also face the loss of colleagues.

With alternative working arrangements currently in place, it is more difficult to provide the normal care and comfort to bereaved colleagues we would want to. This toolkit therefore provides advice and guidance on the steps to take to cope with and support others during bereavement.

Key sources of support can include:

- our HR Business Partners (HRBPs) and Health, Safety and Wellbeing Advisors
- Employee Assistance Programme
- Mental Health First Aiders
- external bereavement resources



Personal Bereavement

Death and bereavement are part of life and yet it is a subject that is very rarely talked about. The unpredictability of life means we can never be sure how soon or how often we will face the challenge of this major life event. Losing someone close to us is probably the most significant loss we will ever have to cope with and can have a tremendous impact, affecting us in many ways.

How might bereavement affect me?

Reactions to loss vary enormously and there is no right or wrong way to respond. However most people report a similar range of reactions and it can be important to know that these are normal and not a sign of illness. When someone close to us dies, some of the many different feelings and reactions we may experience can include:

As well as the emotional pain of the loss, we may also experience practical and financial consequences as a result of the bereavement. These can include accommodation issues, childcare and support difficulties, financial pressures and legal issues connected with settling the estate of someone who has died.

Anger

Denial

Depression

Fear

Feeling let down

Feelings of injustice

Guilt

Hope

Lack of confidence

Loss of identity

Memories

Mood swings

Numbness

Reliving

Remembering

Sadness

Still seeing or hearing that person

Longing

Suicidal thoughts

Covid-19 is making it especially difficult to plan ahead, to see people when they are sick and to gather with others to grieve. Be gentle with yourself and your loved ones at this time of uncertainty.

What can I do?

How an individual responds after the loss of a loved one is very personal. Some of us will find that crying can give relief or being with family or friends can help us feel supported. At other times, we may have a desire to be on our own. It is important to remember that there is no right or wrong way of grieving and giving ourselves permission to feel the way we do rather than the way we think we should feel is important.



Talk

It may be helpful to talk through feelings and memories. This can often help us to understand and process our emotional reactions to the loss and enable us to redefine our relationship with the person who has died. Talking can help others too. However if we don't feel like talking, that is ok too, but it is important to make sure we do not become too isolated.

Guilt

Often people find themselves feeling guilty when they start to re-build their lives. It is important not to feel guilty as it is quite normal to begin to get on with life and is not in any way disloyal to the person who has died.

Plan ahead

Over the first year following a major loss, there will be a whole series of new anniversaries. It can be important to prepare ourselves for these and perhaps to take time off work or think of special things to do on birthdays or other significant dates.

Keep special things

Although a loved one may no longer be around, our relationship with that person does not end with their death. Photographs or other objects can help us to transform the painful memories of the death into a more balanced memory of the importance of the relationship both in the past and in the future.

Allow time to grieve

It can take a long time to learn to adjust to a major bereavement. Allow yourself time.

Be aware of stress

The worries following bereavement can lead to concentration problems and this in turn can make us more accident-prone. Take things slowly.

Avoid addictive substances

Although alcohol or other drugs may temporarily numb the emotional pain of the loss, in the longer term, they may lead to other difficulties.

Take care of ourselves

Regularly eat nourishing food, exercise and take plenty of rest if possible.



Speaking to your line manager and colleagues and understanding what support is available will be helpful. It may be possible to claim various benefits or allowances. For information on a step by step guide following bereavement, financial support, allowances and management of the deceased allowances go to the gov.uk website.

Where can I get help?

Speaking to your GP can sometimes be helpful if you are finding your distress is overwhelming. Alternatively, your GP may suggest speaking to a counsellor as a way of helping you to adjust to what has happened. In the longer term, your GP may suggest medication as a means of helping you through this difficult period.

CRUSE Bereavement Care

A national bereavement organisation offering emotional support regardless of age, race or belief.

UK: www.cruse.org.uk with [support for Bereaved People Affected by Coronavirus](#)

Helpline: 0808 808 1677

Winston's Wish

Offers practical support and help to bereaved children and their families following a loss.

www.winstonswish.org.uk

Tel: 08088 020 021

Information on practicalities of what to do after a death

www.gov.uk/register-a-death

www.nrscotland.gov.uk/registration/registering-a-death

[My CSP Support During Coronavirus](#)

[Marie Curie Article - Supporting an ill Loved One Who You Can't Visit](#)

[Macmillan - Cancer and Coronavirus](#)



Manager support following a bereavement

Grieving is the natural process of coming to terms with and adjusting to loss. Reactions may vary enormously and there is no right or wrong way to respond and no set time scales. Even when individuals feel they are “over it” they may suffer setbacks.

What can I do as a manager?

Acknowledge the person’s grief – a simple “I am sorry for your loss” will make them aware that you empathise with their loss. Use the name of the person they have lost. Do not let your own discomfort prevent you from acknowledging their loss. If you don’t know what to say, say that – it may open a dialogue. Try to really listen.

Ask the person what they would like their colleagues to be told in relation to the death. This may be particularly helpful where the death was sudden, traumatic or that of a child. Colleagues may be concerned about what to say, you can help ease this if you have talked to the bereaved person and are aware of their wishes.

Whilst the employee remains absent from work, agree what level of contact they feel comfortable with, and when it’s appropriate talk to them about their return to work to ease the way. Once back into work continue to offer support and structure by having regular progress checks.

Where possible, offer some flexibility around their working hours, a change of shift or reduced hours for a period may help. Your HRBP will be able to advise you on this. Remember that immediately following the death there will be many practical matters to attend to, together with physical and emotional adjustments, which are further complicated by the COVID-19 situation.

Be prepared to expect less than their best performance when they initially return to work. Generally, the intensity and impact of a person’s grief and their reaction to a bereavement reduce over time, and your patience will help improve their confidence. However, grief is not a sequential process and may come in waves or ebb and flow. When the time feels right, discuss with the employee when they may be ready to return to work and if there are any reasonable adjustments which would help their return. If the person returns but then finds they are not ready, be open to discussing further time off/reasonable adjustments. Again, your HRBP can assist with establishing what reasonable adjustments may be appropriate, following medical advice.



There is no right or wrong way to grieve. Grieving is unique – offer them the time and understanding that is needed. Remember that nothing will feel normal for them.

Be mindful that different faiths and religions will have different ways of responding to loss. Be mindful that special occasions and dates are likely to bring back feelings of grief or trauma.

Additional Support

Please ensure the member of staff is aware of the services provided through the **Employee Assistance Programme (EAP)**. The EAP can offer help with both practical and emotional needs and some services can be used by family members.

There are also excellent **external resources** to help you support someone recently bereaved:

- [Cruse - How to Help Someone Grieving - Do's and Don'ts](#)
- [Refuge in Grief Charity - Do This, Not That Resource pdf](#)
- [Good Life Good Death Good Grief support for workplaces](#)
- [Harvard Business Review Article: When a Colleague is Grieving](#)
- [ACAS - Time Off for Bereavement](#)
- [Mind booklet on bereavement](#)
- [The Compassionate Friends](#)

Staying connected

Bereavement can be very isolating and this is more acute during social distancing and self-isolation. With this in mind, the following may help:

- Keep in touch with the person and let them know about the sources of support available to them. The person may prefer you to talk to another family member. Keeping in touch through whatever means is important, with the emphasis on wellbeing rather than work, particularly in the early stages.
- Seeing peoples' faces, even on video, can create a greater sense of connection than talking on the phone. Always check with the person how much contact they would like and if they would like team members to contact them as well, being careful not to overwhelm them.



- Ask them what detail they would like shared with colleagues. Colleagues can keep their bereavement private if they wish and their wishes should be respected. Be guided by the person.
- Grief can be unpredictable and how it is expressed can also be unpredictable. Reassure the individual that you are there to support them, regardless.

Special Paid Leave for Bereavement

Experiencing bereavement and loss can be one of the biggest personal challenges that many of us will face. Our special leave policy allows employees to take time off to deal with their personal distress and related practical arrangements. Employees are eligible to apply for special paid leave, relating to a bereavement involving a near relative or dependant (defined as spouse, child, parent, foster-parent, stepparent, parent-in-law, sister, brother, grandparent but may in special circumstances include other relatives or non-relative). Managers should consider individual circumstances when deciding the appropriate amount of leave to grant, for example where an employee is an executor and/ or fully responsible for making the funeral arrangements then up to five days' leave may be appropriate. Alternatively if an employee is not involved in making arrangements but wishes to attend the funeral, one day's leave may be appropriate. Due to current social distancing measures, it is recognised that employees may not be not always be able to attend a funeral, however if, for example a memorial service were organised at a later date, it would be reasonable to grant a day's special paid leave for this purpose. For further information on bereavement, please refer to the Special Leave Policy located in the Staff Handbook on E-Connect via Citrix.

Looking after your own wellbeing

As a manager, you shouldn't forget your own wellbeing. Supporting someone through grief can be emotionally exhausting and asking for support for yourself is important. Consider taking a couple of days out of the office, taking time for self-care or finding someone to talk to about how you are feeling. If you don't know what to say or how to approach a situation, you can also make use of the services provided by the EAP.

Responding to a death in service

In the tragic event that a colleague dies, it is essential to show compassion and sensitivity in supporting each other, as well as the individual's family or friends.

You should notify your HRBP as quickly as possible. They will advise and guide you through this period and can help by liaising with the next of kin or family member to ensure all necessary pay and pension actions are taken. They can also support you to:



- communicate the loss to the wider team and stakeholders;
- offer support for colleagues; and
- sensitively arrange the return of personal belongings to the family

Communicating the loss to the wider team should be done with sensitivity, as soon as possible after the notification of a death, so that team members hear the news together. The message should be clear, but delivered carefully and with compassion. Looking after each other will be key. Signpost colleagues to sources of support such as Mental Health First Aiders and the EAP.

Supporting teams

News of a team member passing away can hit work colleagues very hard. As well as grieving for their colleagues, the news makes the Covid-19 crisis very real for those who have vulnerable, elderly or unwell friends or relatives. Keeping team members connected during this time to discuss their loss and how they are feeling, asking them what they need and being able to signpost to relevant services can all help.

Colleagues will need time and space to process the initial information and then begin to grieve in their own ways and in their own time. When their former colleague is referred to in the future, especially in public forums, try to give teams or individuals those most affected advance notice.



Forestry and
Land Scotland
Coilltearachd agus
Fearann Alba