

## Offering Support Following a Bereavement

Death and bereavement are an inevitable part of life, particularly in the current COVID-19 situation, 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.

Grieving is the natural process of coming to terms with and adjusting to a serious 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 a setback. Grieving is a unique experience, but most people report a similar range of reactions that correspond with a number of recognised stages of grief. Some of the feelings and reactions may include anger, denial, depression, lack of confidence, fear, guilt, shock, and despair.

### 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. Do not let your own discomfort prevent you from acknowledging their loss.

**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.

**Keep in contact whilst the employee remains absent from work** - 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. 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.

**If the member of staff has access to an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP), ensure they are aware of this and know how to use it.**

**There is no right or wrong way to grieve and no set timescales.  
Grieving is unique – offer the time and understanding that is needed.**