

RESEARCH COUNCIL GUIDANCE ON MANAGING BEREAVEMENT IN THE WORKPLACE

Guidance

This document provides guidance to managers on dealing with bereavement in the workplace.

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Introduction

This guidance sets out the Research Council approach to managing bereavement in the workplace.

The TU Side have been consulted about the contents of this guidance.

This guidance applies to all Research Council employees. This includes those employed on permanent or temporary contracts, visiting workers, students and those workers provided by a third party agency. The UK Shared Business Services Ltd (UK SBS) provides HR Services across the Research Councils. However some employees are deployed at establishments/facilities/ships that do not access services from SBS. In these cases references to the UK SBS or System (Employee Self Service) will not apply and employees should refer to their Research Council HR team for assistance.

1. Principles

- 1.1 The Research Council acknowledges the personal nature of bereavement and grief and is committed to supporting employees who have suffered a bereavement in practical and reasonable ways. This guidance aims to help managers deal with this difficult situation with their employee, both in the immediate aftermath of bereavement and in the longer term.
- 1.2 This guidance also gives advice on the practical steps to take should a manager need to deal with the death of a member of their team.
- 1.3 This guidance should be read in conjunction with the Research Council Special Leave Policy which provides details of the amount of paid/unpaid leave available to staff in these circumstances. Further advice can be sought from the Research Council HR team.

2. Supporting an employee who has suffered a bereavement

- 2.1 During this period the manager should take a calm, empathetic approach in all communications, and will ensure that employees feel supported, therefore minimising their anxiety about returning to work. The manager should recognise that the employee may be feeling numb or distressed during this initial conversation and may not be able to take in or provide much information. A follow-up call or email may therefore be appropriate.
- 2.2 The manager should recognise that a conversation about when the employee anticipates returning to work may not be appropriate in the first days of bereavement. However, it is important to start a dialogue to allow open discussion around how the employee is coping.

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2.3 The manager should cover the following points in the early days of an employee's bereavement:

- Offer their condolences.
- Reassure the employee that they should not worry about work and that they should take the time they need.
- Ask how they would like to stay in contact, is phone or email contact preferred?
- Ask how much information they wish their co-workers to have about the death, and whether they would mind colleagues making contact with them. Bereavement is a personal issue and employees have the right to keep this confidential under data protection legislation.
- Be conscious of diversity within the workforce and the impact this may have on, for example, days taken to allow the employee to fulfil religious or cultural expectations such as mourning rituals. The Equality Act 2010 protects employees from discrimination because of their religion or belief and therefore requests for time off to observe the belief or custom should be accommodated where possible.
- Be open to revising and reviewing the situation with the employee. Keep the dialogue open.

2.4 Managers should remember that every bereavement is different; some may feel able to return to work swiftly, whilst others may need more time and it is often difficult for bereaved employees to judge how they will feel in the workplace. A swift return to work does not necessarily mean that an employee will not need support.

3. Employees return to work after a bereavement

3.1 Managers should bear in mind that there are likely to be ups and downs as the employee adjusts to life without the person they lost. The full emotional impact may not be felt for some time.

3.2 Regular reviews will be required to discuss and agree strategies or adjustments which may be needed to enable the employee to return to work and to support them in the workplace. Consideration should be given to temporary or long-term:

- flexible working such as a reduction in hours
- home working arrangements
- reduction in responsibilities

3.3 Managers need to be mindful that special or significant days, such as the inquest, anniversary of the death or the birthday of the person who died can be particularly difficult times for the employee. Sensitivity around these times especially when considering requests for specific days off will help employees manage their grief.

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3.4 The employee should be reminded of assistance available via the Employee Assistance Programme and, where available, the Welfare Officers. Details can be provided by the Research Council HR Team. Managers can also direct employees to Cruse Bereavement Care, a national charity offering support to anyone who has been bereaved <http://www.cruse.org.uk/home>.

3.5 If performance issues or high absence rates occur after the bereavement, the manager should contact the Research Council HR team for further advice.

4. Supporting an employee who has a relative with a life-limiting illness

4.1 As with bereavement, everyone will respond differently to a diagnosis of a life-limiting illness concerning a relative. The impact can be similar to bereavement and should not be underestimated.

4.2 It is good practice for managers to open a dialogue and take a compassionate, flexible approach and to hold regular reviews with the employee to check how they are coping. This could mean facilitating time off when needed by utilising annual leave, flexible working, special leave (paid and unpaid) or a career break.

5. Dealing with the death of an employee

5.1 Should a manager be notified of the death of an employee they should immediately inform the Research Council HR Team, who will carry out the necessary operational actions such as contacting the relevant pensions administrator and UK SBS.

5.2 The manager (or other Senior Manager/Research Council HR team member) should contact the family within a couple of days to:

- Offer condolences
- Inquire about funeral service arrangements and whether colleagues are welcome to attend
- Determine the family's wishes regarding remembrances and where sympathy cards should be sent – some families may appreciate flowers while others may prefer that donations be made to charity
- Explain that JSS will be in touch regarding death in service compensation/pension arrangements
- Arrange to return personal belongings to the family (some families may prefer to visit the workplace to collect the items, while others may wish to have the items sent or dropped off by a colleague) and to retrieve any work related equipment from the deceased's home (this does not need to be arranged immediately and again will depend on the family's wishes)

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- 5.3 The manager will need to notify immediate colleagues in a sensitive manner, and should remind them of the Employee Assistance Programme and, where available the Welfare Officers.
- 5.4 Consideration should also be given to notifying colleagues throughout the Research Council. Advice on the most sensitive and effective way to communicate should be sought from the Research Council HR Team.
- 5.5 The manager will need to monitor the morale of the affected department over the following days and weeks as it may take some time for the group to adjust.

6. Guidance review

- 6.1 This guidance will be regularly reviewed to incorporate any legislation changes. The TU may request that guidance is reviewed.

7. Amendment history

Version	Date	Comments/Changes