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**How to support a bereaved member of staff**

Losing a loved one is one of the most devastating and stressful experiences many of us will ensure. It is however something that almost everyone will experience at some point during their lives. Grief impacts upon almost every aspect of the bereaved person’s life. It can interfere with their thought processes, concentration and sleep patterns at a time when they may need to make important decisions. Fatigue, anxiety and mood swings are common. Responding to bereavement in the workplace can be challenging but taking an effective, compassionate approach combined with management support can make a significant difference to a bereaved member of staff.

Managers should be aware of and consider the following:

* Everyone grieves differently. There are [five defined stages of grief](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/K%C3%BCbler-Ross_model) but these are not linear – some people may go through all stages several times. Grief can cause people to act differently than they normally would, including at work.
* Work can be a coping mechanism. While your initial reaction might be to encourage a bereaved member of staff to take time off (and this is often appropriate) be aware that some people may welcome the routine of work. They may not however, perform at their usual capacity. You may therefore need to adjust their workload or duties on a temporary basis.
* It’s important to start a dialogue which will allow discussion around how they are coping, when they might be ready to return to work, and any adjustments that might help with this (e.g. a phased return).
* Be open to revising and reviewing the situation with the individual. Keep the dialogue open.
* Check what the member of staff wants colleagues to be told (if anything).
* Offer flexibility. Allow staff to use take annual leave in addition to compassionate leave if they wish to do so. Allow them to choose the date that they return and remain flexible with regards to hours and location of work.
* Remember that there may be differing practical requirements relating to bereavement. For example, and a member of staff may be required to organise the funeral or be an executor of a will, which may involve ongoing time commitments.
* Be sensitive and remain compassionate. Check in with the member of staff on their return to work and on a regular basis. Be alert for signs of underlying distress. Ask if any additional support is required.
* Refer staff to the University counseling service if required.

Please also review the University Policy on Special Leave which sets out the leave that is available in the event of bereavement. Managers should use their discretion on the application of special leave, taking into account the relevant circumstances. Advice is available from HR.