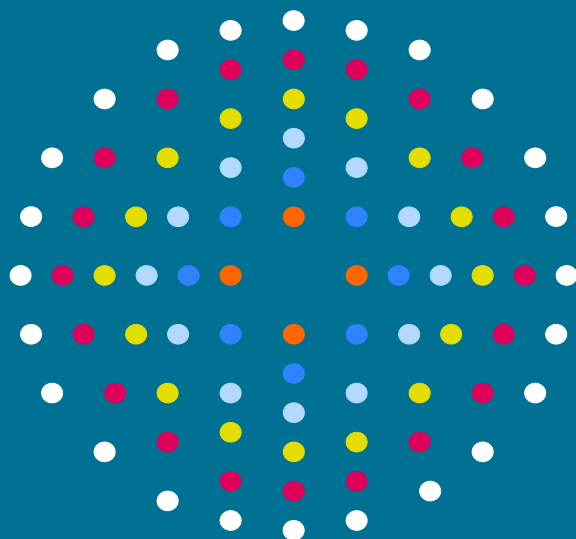




Department of Justice and Equality
An Roinn Dlí agus Cirt agus Comhionannais

Loss and Resilience

Dealing with Grief and Bereavement at Work



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Dealing with bereavement, grief and loss is an inevitable and normal part of life and work. It is a painful reality which all of us have to face at some point in our lives. Dealing with such issues is challenging, especially at work where it can be seen as a taboo topic which is best avoided or at least dealt with privately.

The Department acknowledges that it has a clear responsibility to provide help and support to staff who are affected by loss. The individual nature of grief requires flexibility and discretion in the organisation's response, but this policy will try to provide guidance that supports a fair and consistent approach in different situations.

Flexibility

Unlike some other policies, a degree of flexibility is needed in interpreting this policy. Circumstances will differ and no two employees will have the same experience or needs at a time of loss. At the same time, however, consistency in policy interpretation is important to ensure a fair approach to different situations. HR Division will provide support and advice to individuals and managers to guide any discretionary action.

Cultural Diversity

The Department recognises that policy interpretation must allow for flexibilities relating to the multi cultural nature of the workforce. Different cultures respond to death in significantly different ways and the Department will facilitate this as far as possible. To assist in this, individuals are encouraged to communicate individual needs to their manager, colleagues and HR Division.

Grief at Work

Employees most commonly experience the impact of grief through the death of someone close to them. Grief is a normal, though difficult, part of life. Work is also a normal part of life and the workplace along with family, friends and relatives has an important role in helping employees to adjust to the losses that they encounter.

A workplace that proactively supports bereaved employees helps them to come to terms with their loss and supports their re-engagement with work.

Grief is not an illness and does not need to be fixed. It is a process of adjustment which the grieving person has to negotiate.

How Grief Affects Employees

Grief is the normal and natural response to the loss of someone or something important. It is a natural part of life. Grief is a typical reaction to death, divorce, job loss, a move away from family and friends, or loss of good health due to illness.

Grief affects people in a number of ways including physically, emotionally, psychologically and spiritually. Below are some of the normal reactions that employees may experience when grieving:

Physical

They may feel grief in their bodies through pains, aches and fatigue. Other physical aspects of grief include:

- Tiredness
- Sleep disturbances
- Appetite disturbances
- Crying
- Weakness in muscles
- Feeling flat and lacking enthusiasm
- Breathlessness

Emotional

Emotions may at times be manageable and at other times the grieving person may feel overwhelmed.

- Sadness
- Anger
- Guilt and self-reproach
- Relief
- Anxiety
- Loneliness
- Helplessness
- Numbness

Psychological

Grief is not easy to control, thoughts about the person who has died can suddenly come in to their minds when they least expect it. Psychological reactions that may occur when grieving include:

- Difficulty concentrating
- Disbelief

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- Confusion
- Preoccupation with the person who has died
- Dreaming of the deceased person

Spiritual

Death can bring up important questions of meaning for people. Why did this happen? What is the meaning of my life now without this person? Spiritual grief reactions include:

- Trying to make sense of what has happened
- Manifestation of anger towards faith or belief
- Searching for meaning
- Questioning

The Grieving Process

Each person's grief is unique and individual to that person. Some employees are very private and do not want everyone to know their business, while others prefer to talk openly about what has happened to them. Both are appropriate.

On the whole, individuals tend to negotiate the following main issues in the grieving process:

- Accepting the loss
- Experiencing the pain
- Adjusting to an environment without the deceased
- Finding a new emotional place for the person who has died

The single most important factor in coming to terms with grief is social support. While the grieving process is individual, the support of friends, family, colleagues and others in the workplace is very important. This support can be practical, such as sharing some work tasks, doing the shopping or school run; social, such as continuing to invite or include the person on social events; and / or emotional, such as checking in with the person from time to time.

There is no guide as to how long grief lasts. It is different for each person. It is important to realise that, while grief and its intensity will subside, most find that it is replaced with a 'sweet sadness' that comes at times of remembrance. This is simply the acknowledgement that significant loss has occurred, that the loss, and the person who is gone, matters and affects our lives.

There are many factors that affect how long a person grieves, including age, maturity, personality, physical and mental health, coping style, culture, spiritual and religious background, family background, other stressors and life experiences. The time spent grieving may also depend on how prepared a person was before the loss was experienced.

Types of Grief and Loss

Anticipatory Mourning

When a person or family is expecting death, it is normal to begin to anticipate how one will react and cope when that person eventually dies. Many family members will try to envision their life without that person and mentally play out possible scenarios, which may include grief reactions and ways they will mourn and adjust after the death.

Anticipatory mourning includes feelings of loss, concern for the dying person, balancing conflicting demands and preparing for death. Anticipatory mourning is a natural process that enables the family more time to slowly prepare for the reality of the loss. People are often able to complete unfinished 'business' with the dying person (for example, saying 'good-bye', 'I love you', or 'I forgive you').

Sudden Loss

Grief experienced after a sudden, unexpected death is different from anticipatory mourning. Sudden, unexpected loss may exceed the coping abilities of a person, which often results in feelings of being overwhelmed and/or unable to function. Even though one may be able to acknowledge that loss has occurred, the full impact of loss may take much longer to fully comprehend than in the case of an expected loss.

Complicated Grief

There are times when grief does not progress as expected; the intensity and duration of grief is prolonged and dramatically interferes with a person's ability to function. Symptoms of depression and anxiety may be prevalent and prolonged. Thoughts, feelings, behaviours

and reactions may seem to persist over long periods of time with little change or improvement. In these situations, it is important to seek help from a qualified professional who can assess the individual situation and make recommendations that will help. It is important to seek help; complicated grief does not subside on its own.

Supporting Employees who are Grieving

Many employees when asked about what they would find helpful in their workplace if they were coping with a significant loss mention three things:

1. That their loss would be acknowledged.
2. That they would be treated as normally as possible.
3. That their manager would be flexible.

The Department offers a period of bereavement leave which is intended to support staff in the immediate period around the death of a relative. Details of leave entitlements are outlined later in this policy. Managers and colleagues should make themselves aware that staff who are grieving can take significant time to work through their loss and each case will be personal to each individual.

Staff who have any concerns about how the grieving process will impact on their work performance should discuss this in confidence¹ with either their line manager or HR Division to ensure necessary supports are put in place.

In some cases, those who are bereaved may wish to avail of the support of the Civil Service Employee Assistance Service (CSEAS).

The CSEAS provides a wide range of confidential supports to civil servants who may experience life challenges, including bereavement. The CSEAS Head Office is in Dublin with further regional offices located in Tullamore, Limerick, Cork, Sligo, and Castlebar. Contact can be made with the CSEAS at tel no. 076-1000030 or at email cseas@per.gov.ie

Full details on the CSEAS, and the services available can be viewed on the CSEAS website www.cseas.per.gov.ie

The CSEAS is also available as a support to managers who require guidance on helping staff who are experiencing grief.

¹ For information on confidentiality, and exceptions to this, please refer to the CSEAS website

It is recognised that there are different levels of grieving and appropriate levels of support need to be available to reflect this. These different levels are described below. As an organisation we will try to ensure that general support is there for you, a loved one or a colleague if grieving a loss and that you are aware how to access additional support if required.

Level 1 – General Support. This type of support can be provided by colleagues in the workplace and the majority of people will not require further support. It involves providing information on the grieving process, social support and practical help with tasks.

Level 2 – Extra Support. Counselling and support services can be a guide through some of the challenges of grieving as a person adjusts to their loss. Self-help groups are often available and are there for participants to support one another. You could, for example, consult a hospice in your local community, as all hospice bereavement programmes provide grief support to the community, regardless of whether the deceased one was cared for by the hospice or not.

Level 3 – Therapy Support. Grief support and counselling can be provided by professionals. This is appropriate for individuals who experience complicated grief or become stuck in their grieving process and it is important to seek help in these situations.

The Role of the Manager

The manager plays a key role in supporting the bereaved employee. S/he will generally know the employee and their circumstances and will be used to dealing with them on a day to day basis.

Short-term

- Establish good communication with the bereaved employee, acknowledge their loss, check what information they want to share and inform colleagues appropriately. Discuss if they wish to be contacted during their absence and arrange to talk at a later date to discuss their return to work.
- Inform HR Division of the loss and make arrangements for the information to be circulated throughout the Department, if appropriate.
- Ensure that the bereaved staff member is aware that they must take whatever time off from work they need. Arrangements regarding leave can be made between the

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staff member and the manager upon return to work, in line with the leave entitlements outlined in this document.

- Attend funeral rituals and allow colleagues to do the same where possible, and provide practical help where appropriate.
- Show flexibility and understanding around work issues and manage their return to work.
- Seek advice from someone who has experience of dealing with grief e.g. an Employee Assistance Officer.

Long-term

- Maintain good communication with the bereaved employee and adjust work requirements as necessary.
- Learn about the grieving process and the organisation's policy and supports.
- Be aware of bereaved employees who may be struggling with their grief and direct them towards appropriate additional supports.
- Encourage social, practical and emotional support of the bereaved employee.
- Be aware that grief can impact on concentration, energy levels and productivity, often for longer than may be expected and that sensitivity and understanding is required, especially around workload.

Deaths Affecting the Work Group

In the event of the death of a colleague, it is possible that you and other members of your team may need emotional support after the loss. Where a critical situation such as this occurs, the CSEAS can offer support on an individual basis, or meet relevant staff in a group setting. HR Division or the relevant line manager can contact the CSEAS to discuss the most appropriate response.

It is important that any staff member who becomes aware of the death of a colleague informs their line manager who will then liaise with HR Division to ensure that the necessary supports and actions are put in place.

As the manager of an area but who is also a colleague, it is likely that you will be affected by the death. It is natural for you to feel upset and be uncertain about what to say. There may be times when you think that you are not doing the right thing or helping enough.

Managing such a situation can be physically and emotionally exhausting. When the challenge is great, it's important to discuss the situation with HR Division and/or access support such as the CSEAS to explore self-care options.

HR Division may be able to offer you advice and support to help you manage the situation. Discuss concerns with your manager or another manager. They may have experiences you can draw upon and act as a sounding board for your management plan.

The CSEAS is available to provide advice and support in managing emotional and/or work related issues arising as a result of the bereavement.

There are also many other sources of information that can help you understand the death and communicate more effectively with people affected by it. See Appendix at the back of this document for a list of helpful resources.

Even where a team knew that their colleague was terminally ill, it can be extremely difficult to come to terms with that person's passing. Different team members will react differently to the news and some may need your personal and professional support.

Not every staff member will want to talk about the death, some may internalise their true feelings. It is important to recognise that the impact of a close colleague's death can last for a long time and emerge at different times and for different reasons.

Remember you are not immune to the emotional fall out of a close working colleague and friend being diagnosed with a critical illness or passing away.

The Role of Colleagues

Death and grief spare no one and are normal life events. All cultures have developed expectations and norms about coping with death. It is important to understand someone else's loss from the perspective of the cultural and family traditions unique to that individual.

When people are grieving, thoughts and emotions are often heightened. People who care about the bereaved are often unsure how to be helpful; they do not know what to say or do. The primary and most important thing to do is to show that you care by being present and by listening and supporting colleagues who are grieving. Offering advice or suggestions

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is not needed; try to become comfortable with quietly supporting a person with your presence.

There is no right way to grieve and mourn. Be very careful not to impose your ideas, beliefs and expectations on someone else, no matter how much you think it might help. The following are some suggestions of ways you can support a grieving colleague:

- Acknowledge the bereaved person's loss.
- Keep it simple and say something that reflects how you feel.
- Acknowledge all feelings. Their grief reactions are natural and necessary. Do not pass judgment on how well they are or are not coping. Respect both their openness and their reticence in talking about the grief.
- Understand and accept cultural and religious perspectives about illness and death that may be different from your own. For example, support a decision which is made by a family because of their beliefs, even if this may not be what you would do.
- Acknowledge that life won't 'feel the same' and the person may not be able to 'get back to normal'. Continue to extend invitations to social events, but be accepting if your offer is declined.
- Be willing to stay engaged for a long time. Your colleague will need your support and presence in the weeks and months to come after most others will have withdrawn.
- Be specific in your willingness to help. Offer assistance with work tasks where appropriate, and communicate with the line manager.
- Check on your colleague as time passes and months go by. Periodic check-ins can be helpful throughout the first two years after the death. Stay in touch by writing a note, calling, stopping by to visit.
- Be sensitive to holidays and special days. For someone grieving a death, certain days may be more difficult and can magnify the sense of loss. Anniversaries and birthdays can be especially hard. Some people find it helpful to be with family and friends, others may wish to avoid traditions and try something different.

The Role of the Department and HR Division

HR Division will support employees who are dealing with grief as well as providing support and advice to colleagues and managers of employees dealing with grief. HR Division, on behalf of the Department, will:

Short-term

- Ensure an open and proactive approach to employee bereavement amongst all staff, especially senior managers.
- Acknowledge the employee's loss and facilitate staff to attend funeral rituals.
- Support managers in adopting a flexible and sensitive approach to employee bereavement situations.

Long-term

- Make sure that the bereavement policy is available to all staff.
- Train staff in understanding the grieving process.
- Work proactively at creating an organisational culture that is supportive of employee bereavement through training and events.
- Facilitate employees return to work.

The Role of the CSEAS

The CSEAS is available to support managers as well as employees in dealing with many issues, including bereavement. Employee Assistance Officers (EAOs) have a lot of experience in dealing with situations of loss and can assist a manager to explore help/supports that may be beneficial to bereaved staff members.

Supporting Working Caregivers

Caring for someone who is terminally ill can be a very stressful situation for an employee. Employees in a care giving role can experience grief even before the person dies. Therefore, it is important that the Department and the managers show understanding and flexibility to staff members who are caregivers. Knowing that the manager understands one's situation and is willing to be flexible in terms of how, when and where the work gets done is a tremendous relief for a care giving employee.

The Department offers support for care giving employees through flexibility around:

- Work hours – flexitime, part-time, job sharing etc.
- Workplace – use of technology, working from home.
- Paid, unpaid and compassionate leave.

The responsibility and right of employees to care for family members is recognised in legislation through the Carer's Leave Act, 2001.

Supporting a Grieving Caregiver

To support a colleague who has been a caregiver who is grieving, ask how you can best help, and listen for what they seem to need. Express your concern for how the illness is affecting them personally. Even if you have been a caregiver yourself, don't say you know what they are going through. Empathize, by saying, 'I am so very sorry', but don't say you understand. Each situation is unique and each person responds in ways that are uniquely their own. Even though you may have been a caregiver yourself, you cannot understand this situation from another person's perspective. Be willing to listen, to learn, to look for ways in which you can support and be helpful.

When care giving ends, it is normal to feel both bereaved and relieved, but caregivers often feel guilty about any feelings of relief they may experience. Remind them that these feelings are normal and common. Caring for a loved one can be exhausting work, but when care giving ends, time often seems endless.

Health and Safety

Sometimes people are not aware of how death is affecting them and this has implications for safety critical jobs.

Any staff member who is concerned with their ability to safely conduct their duties in the weeks following the loss of an immediate relative should discuss this with their line manager and/or HR division.

Leave Entitlements

Bereavement Leave - Special Leave with Pay

The relevant Department of Finance Circular and/or PeoplePoint should be referred to for advice on the amount of paid and unpaid leave which can be granted. At present, special leave with pay in the event of serious and unforeseen illness or death of an officer's immediate relative may be granted as follows:

- 5 working days in the case of a spouse or child. This includes a cohabiting partner and adopted child or acting 'loco parentis'.
- 3 working days in the case of other immediate relatives i.e. father, step father, father in law, mother, step mother, mother in law, brother, step brother, half brother, brother in law, sister, step sister, half sister, sister in law, grandfather, grandmother, grandchild.
- 1 working day in the case of aunt, uncle, niece and nephew.

The provisions of this paragraph may also be applied, in exceptional circumstances, in the event of the serious and unforeseen illness of a more distant relative.

Bereavement Leave - Special Leave without Pay

An officer may be granted special leave without pay for domestic reasons subject to the following conditions and upper limits:

- 6 months to
 - (i) cope with difficulties arising from the death or serious illness of an immediate relative, or
 - (ii) care for an immediate relative during sickness or old age provided no suitable person other than the officer is available to provide the care.
- 2 months to
 - (i) travel abroad to visit an immediate relative suffering from serious and unforeseen illness, provided the officer is the only person who can make the visit, or
 - (ii) deal with urgent domestic affairs other than those referred to elsewhere in this paragraph.

Requests for such leave should be made by the officer to PeoplePoint as soon as possible upon return to work.

Annual Leave

An officer whose annual leave allowance has been exhausted and who, in the last 3 months of the leave year, is faced with a compelling but unforeseen obligation involving absence from duty (for example, making funeral arrangements) may for this purpose be allowed to anticipate up to 2 days of his/her annual leave allowance for the next leave year.

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In the event of a death of an immediate relative, an employee may be facilitated in taking annual leave at short notice to supplement their bereavement leave. Requests should be directed to the line manager.

An employee who suffers a family bereavement whilst on annual leave can avail of bereavement leave and take their displaced annual leave at a future date.

Carers leave

Under the Carers Leave Act, employees may be entitled to avail of unpaid leave to enable them to personally provide full time care and attention for a person who is in need of such care. At present, an employee is entitled to a maximum of 104 weeks in respect of any one care recipient. The minimum statutory entitlement is 13 weeks. Further information about carers leave is available on the PeoplePoint portal.

Advice for the Bereaved Person

- Some people find it helpful to send a statement to their place of work to inform them of their bereavement and to avoid having to tell their colleagues individually.
- Share your feelings with those whom you feel safe.
- Don't feel that you have to talk about it.
- Discussion with management can help to prepare a plan for return to work, such as how much time off is required and how to handle the return.
- Be open about the kind of support that you want and don't want.
- Avail of the services offered by the CSEAS if you think this might be helpful.
- Communicate with your line manager and take the amount of time off work that you need to deal with the death. You may need to take an additional period of leave some time after the death, and you need to be aware of your own feelings and requirements.

Return to Work

For some people, returning to the workplace is an overwhelming burden in addition to their grief and they may need time off. It is important that managers are aware that staff may be affected by reduced work performance due to tiredness from emotion, feelings of depression or lack of concentration. The bereaved staff member may also worry that they are performing at a lower standard and taking time off from work.

In certain circumstances a full return to work may not be possible for an employee following the death of an immediate relative, for example where new child care arrangements have to be sourced or responsibility for the care of an elderly parent has transferred to the employee.

In such instances it may be possible to facilitate a phased return to work on a part-time or reduced hours basis. Any such arrangement needs to be agreed in advance with the line manager through HR.

Conclusions

The Department acknowledges the personalised nature of bereavement and grief and is committed to supporting employees in practical and reasonable ways. Any queries or requests should be directed to your line manager in the first instance, or HR Division.

Dealing proactively with death in the workplace can be challenging. This policy is a first step but we recognise that it has limitations and will need to be amended from time to time.

Appendix: Useful Bereavement Resources

Courses and training

Requests for training should be listed on PMDS forms in the usual manner. Immediate training requests should be sent to corporatelearning@justice.ie

Useful Supports

- The Civil Service Employee Assistance Service.
Tel: 076 1000030 www.cseas.per.gov.ie
- Bereavement Counselling Service
www.bereavementireland.com
- Console - Irish suicide charity
Helpline: 1800 247 247 www.console.ie
- Barnardos – Irish charity providing bereavement counselling for children.
Helpline: 01 4732110.
www.barnardos.ie/barnardosbereavementcounselling.htm
- Irish Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy - Directory of accredited counsellors and psychotherapists.
Tel: 01 2300061. www.irish-counselling.ie
- Rainbows - Irish voluntary service for children
Tel: 01 4734175 www.rainbowsireland.ie
- Anam Cara - supporting parents after bereavement
Tel: 01 4045378 www.anamcara.ie
- Psychological Society of Ireland
www.psihq.ie

Cultural diversity

- The Immigrant Council of Ireland - Independent, non-governmental organisation promoting the rights of migrants.
Tel: 01 6740200. www.immigrantcouncil.ie

Information on bereavement

- Irish Hospice Foundation
Leaflets and information by professionals and people who have experienced different types of loss
Tel: 01 6793188 www.hospice-foundation.ie
- Citizens Information Board – Practical advice.
Tel: 01 605 9000. www.ciboard.ie
- Family Support Agency – National directory of family bereavement support organisations.
Tel: 01 6114100. www.fsa.ie

Resources on care giving

- The Carers Association of Ireland
Tel: 056 7721424. www.carersireland.com
- Care Alliance Ireland – National network of voluntary organisations supporting family carers.
Tel: 01 8747776. www.carealliance.ie

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