



Ministry
of Defence

Bereavement Line manager guide



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COVID-19

Coping with bereavement and grief

The COVID-19 pandemic is an unprecedented and difficult time for all.

Whilst we know that the majority of individuals who contract coronavirus recover, our team members may be faced with the loss of life under very difficult circumstances - whether a family member, friend or a colleague.

This document is relevant for all types of bereavement, however, we have put it together to make sure it covers COVID19. It provides support for line managers who may have team members who have lost a loved one, or if a member of their team passes away (also referred to as death in service). In most cases the bereaved individual's line manager will take the lead in supporting the individual and/or the team affected and in leading death in service support.

This guide is by no means exhaustive and you are encouraged to seek further assistance from your management chain, colleagues and through the resources listed at the end of this guide.

We recognise that each loss will bring with it grief, which each individual will respond to differently. How this is handled in an organisation can have a lasting impact on the individuals directly affected and wider teams. We hope this pack will aid line managers through the experience of grief.



Bereavement within teams

Supporting yourself

Coping with loss is always difficult. It can take time to understand your feelings and adjust, but there are things you can do to help, including connecting with others and looking after your wellbeing.

Let colleagues know how you are feeling and when you are finding things difficult. This is a situation that is hard to feel prepared for and so it is okay to feel stuck or overwhelmed. What is important is to reach out for help whenever needed.

This may include emotional or practical support with any challenging tasks, answering questions you have, or just a friendly voice to speak to. You can access support through your line manager, your HR Business Partner, and the Employee Assistance Programme.



Bereavement within teams

Supporting your team

There is no time limit on grief and no right or wrong way to feel following a loss. The experience of grief is different for everybody. Some people seek help immediately, show their emotions and want to talk to people. Others may deal with grief more slowly or quietly.

As a manager, you are well placed to know what is worrying a team member or stopping them from giving their best. While communicating digitally poses another potential challenge, you can continue to support your team members by maintaining regular, open and meaningful contact with each other. You can also reassure your team that there will be opportunities to be together for remembrance once social distancing guidelines are lifted.

The next few pages cover some practical tips for you to refer to on how best to support your team members through this difficult time.





Supporting staff members with loss

If your employee contacts you to tell you that someone close to them has passed away you should respond sympathetically and focus on how you can help them.

Stay connected

Try to stay in contact with the member of staff. Find out if they can talk on the phone, or over the internet if they have the technology available. Agree how often to keep in touch.

Let them talk about how they are feeling and about the person who has died – talking can be one of the most helpful things after someone dies. Consider sending a letter, card or note to let them know you are thinking of them.

Practical considerations

- how you can support their wellbeing
- agree leave requirements
- arrange for others to pick up any urgent work
- help them to access sources of support



Tips

- **be caring and compassionate**, ensure your staff member knows you're available but ensure you take their lead on how much contact is required, acknowledging we all grieve in different ways
- make time to talk and listen to team members so you understand how you can support them further. It's important to be open and approachable, acknowledging everyone will react differently and show empathy
- offer your condolences and check in to see what friends and family support they have available to them
- ask how much information they want co-workers to know, and if they wish to be contacted by colleagues
- stay in regular contact and offer further support through the [Employee Assistance Programme \(EAP\)](#)
- The [Charity for Civil Servants](#) can also provide practical, emotional and financial support to civil servants and their financial dependants
- remember that the full impact of a bereavement may not be felt immediately and is likely to continue for quite some time after the death. It's important to remember that beyond the death, there might be matters to resolve in relation to the deceased's estate (house clearance etc) which might be traumatic and as such, the support and open lines of communication must remain to fully support your staff
- in the current situation, they may not be able to attend the funeral unless an immediate family member passed away. Please check the Coronavirus full [guidance](#) on staying at home
- you may need to offer [special leave](#) or [compassionate leave](#) whilst the individual grieves for their loss

Grief in isolation

Grief in isolation could make feelings of loneliness and grief more intense and further compounded by anxiety around the circumstances of Covid-19. This may make it harder for individuals to process grief.

At this time of uncertainty and fear many people may struggle more than usual, but you can help by being present virtually.

Stay in contact more and let the individual lead, for example:

- ask whether they prefer phone, text or video call (if they have it)
- let them talk about how they are feeling and about the person who has died – talking can be one of the most helpful things after someone dies
- Let them know the EAP emotional support service is available to immediate family members too



Supporting the wider team if a staff member passes away

Communicating the death of a colleague

Immediate steps to take:

- as we are currently working remotely, colleagues can be informed via Skype where face to face communication is not possible. Only inform colleagues 'officially' by short note sent via email, as a final option
- keep the message simple and direct, for example, 'I'm sorry I have to tell you some bad news. '.... has passed away' or something equally simple. The person you are speaking to will be shocked and may find too much information at once difficult to take in
- encourage staff to take time out to process the information, seek support or discuss with family, friends, colleagues
- where possible, if you know that the person who has passed away has particularly close friends or colleagues who are not in the office, try and arrange to contact them before their return to work
- please signpost team members to the support available, particularly the EAP. You should keep reminding team members about this support over the coming weeks
- When a civilian employee in the MOD passes away, the Line Manager or family member must notify the DBS Employee Services team to report the event via the direct email: DBSCivPers-Wellbeing@mod.gov.uk Please ensure you provide your telephone number for the team to get back in contact with you. You can call the business critical line on 07773 474976 only if you have no access to email

Supporting the wider team if a staff member passes away

Practical tips

- offer to help to check the deceased's diary and inform meeting organisers and attendees that day, that week and the next week as soon as possible. Later meetings can wait a day or so, but don't forget them
- hold a section team meeting (or several) within a day or so. If no one on the section is willing or able to lead (perhaps because they are very upset or have lost their normal chair of meetings), HR Business Partners (HRBPs) can offer some assistance
- after everyone knows, arrange communications to celebrate and share memories of the individual
- ensure senior leaders are available to team members that may want to talk about their colleague or how they are feeling
- as the line manager, you will be responsible for making contact with the family members. You will want to check they are comfortable with how information is shared more widely – for example, putting communication on the intranet
- signpost to ongoing support for team members, via EAP/single Service Welfare agencies and other support providers
- remember to be aware of your own emotions as well. The EAP is available to line managers experiencing emotional distress too

Dealing with your own mental health and emotional resilience

While supporting team members is vital, so is your own mental health, it's important to recognize the impact a bereavement may have had on you. Remember, there is support available for you too.

- please keep talking to your team, line manager, senior managers and welfare staff and draw on their support
- your HRBP and welfare staff are available to support you with the practical steps that need to be taken with the death of a colleague. Although you will be the liaison with the colleague's family members, again ask for support if you are finding this difficult
- make use of internal initiatives such as Mental Health First Aiders, the EAP and Combat Stress helpline as all can offer confidential free emotional support, EAP also offers counselling
- utilise your own support networks of friends and family, via telephone/video call

Resources

Civilian

- [Employee Assistance Programme](#)
- [MOD Wellbeing Portal](#)
- [Charity for Civil Servants](#) support past and present civil servants when times are tough, listen without passing judgement and offer practical, financial and emotional support.
- [MOD Main - Report a Death in Service](#)
- [Cruse.org.uk Support for Bereaved People Affected by Coronavirus](#) - the leading national charity for bereaved people. It offers support, advice and information face-to-face, via telephone and online to people who have lost someone.
- The [Bereavement Advice Centre](#) has a host of materials to support someone recently bereaved
- [Public Health England: Looking after your feelings and your body](#)
- [Marie Curie Article - Supporting an ill Loved One Who You Can't Visit](#)
- [Macmillan - Cancer and Coronavirus](#)
- [Child Bereavement UK](#)
- Coping with Bereavement – AgeUK - [How can I cope with my feelings after the death of a loved one?](#)

Resources

Military

- [Combat Stress](tel:08001381619): 0800 1381619
- Naval Service Family and People Support
 - navynps-peoplesptnsfpsptl@mod.gov.uk
 - telephone: 0800 145 6088
- Army Welfare Service
 - RC-AWS-IAT-0Mailbox@mod.gov.uk
 - 01904 882053
- [SSAFA](tel:03000111723): 03000 111 723
- [JSP 751, Part , Vol 3](#) provides:
 - Chapter 1: Overseas Compassionate Travel at Public Expense, that includes the various Compassionate categories that are assessed by JCCC caseworkers or CoC for travel.
- [JSP7 60, Part 1](#) provides policy guidance for:
 - Chapter 2: Authorised Absence (Special Paid Leave).
 - Chapter 22: Compassionate Leave (this links to the Compassionate Travel at Public Expense element).