

Covid-19 Death and Bereavement Support

It is recognised that Covid-19 is a unique situation that may require greater flexibility for some as the processes normally in place (death certificates, funerals, ceremonies, religious considerations, domestic arrangements etc) are unlikely to be straightforward. There is also the potential for heightened loneliness and isolation.

Lancaster University has put together a package of information to support staff and students who may be directly affected by Covid-19, for example due to the death of a family member, a colleague or team member, a student, or someone they directly line manage. This has included:

- FAQs for staff
- FAQs for line managers
- A [Staff Wellbeing portal](#)
- A communications protocol in the event of the death of a student or employee, including template notices
- Signposting to policies such as compassionate leave
- Signposting to support available, both through the University and through organisations which support people through bereavement.

Some organisations have suggested they would find it useful to share some of these resources so we have put together a short summary of the guidance and links to more information. If you would like to find out more about how Lancaster University is supporting staff affected by bereavement during Covid-19, please contact:

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SUPPORTING COLLEAGUES

[Sudden](#) is a charitable initiative for suddenly bereaved people and the people caring for them. It has produced some useful online guidance to [help people bereaved by COVID-19](#). Whilst there are no rules around supporting mental health associated with bereavement, [this information provided by Sudden](#) provides a list of common and normal reactions experienced by people who are bereaved suddenly. It also provides advice on how you can help care for yourself at this difficult time.

If you are concerned about the mental health of a colleague following bereavement

The sudden death of someone close can be a terrible shock. It can leave feelings of numbness, bewilderment, tiredness and helplessness, as well as deep sadness. The relationship between you and your colleague is the basis of how to approach this. For some staff members, it will be really important to them for you to show that you care and provide an opportunity for them to talk. It is important to remember that you are not a counsellor or a therapist, but you can provide support and empathy.

Whilst there are no rules around supporting mental health associated with bereavement, steps could include:

- Telling them that their wellbeing matters, and help is available
- Asking them what they need
- Asking some gentle questions that help you to check they are safe.

You should let the conversation flow naturally and, when appropriate, remind them of the support that staff can access. Pauses in conversations are OK so avoid interrupting or talking without need. You should try to avoid talking about yourself or your own problems, or look to impose your own beliefs and values.

How do I maintain my own mental health whilst supporting someone through bereavement?

You are important and supporting someone who has suddenly been bereaved can be upsetting and a drain on your own emotional resources. You need to be aware of your own needs and feelings during this time.

Think about only offering what help you can reasonably give. You do not have to do more than you are comfortable with. You should also consider, in advance, who can support you, if you need it, and when you may need support. Make best use of the specialist support services and signpost your team to them, allowing you to step back from supporting them when you need to.

USEFUL LINKS

The following links provide helpful information for **organisations** on supporting employees through bereavement:

[Bereavement and the workplace – factsheet from Institute of Directors](#)

[HR Guide: To Bereavement & How You Can Help – Business 2 Community](#)

[How to Support Employees through Grief and Loss – The Society for Human Resource Management](#)

[Managing bereavement in the workplace – a good practice guide – ACAS](#)

Further information for **individuals**:

[Coronavirus: grieving and isolation - Cruse Bereavement Care](#)