

**Supporting you through
bereavement during Covid-19**
Guidance for staff and volunteers

acorns
Your local children's hospice



The death of someone close or a loved one can be a difficult emotional experience and one that may feel overwhelming. Following a bereavement, it is likely that you will experience a range of emotions as you grieve and start to adjust to life without that person.

If your bereavement is due to Covid-19, it is likely you will have been unprepared for the illness, and your loss, and may experience feelings of shock. It might therefore take time for you to start to process and make sense of your experience and the reality of the death.

Sadly, measures that have been put in place to manage Covid-19 may have meant that you were unable to visit your loved one in hospital, or to have been with them during their end of life care. It is also possible that you and your family and friends will not have been able to hold the type of funeral that you would have wished for. Where this is the case, it might be helpful to think about alternate ways in which you can still say your goodbyes or to consider a separate memorial service when it is safe for people to gather again.

With households needing to self-isolate and socially distance due to Covid-19, it may be that you find yourself feeling alone with your grief and it can therefore be important to stay in touch and connected with relatives, friends and colleagues. Sometimes it can be helpful to make use of strategies that you have previously found beneficial during difficult periods – e.g. talking to friends, getting plenty of rest.

Managing your mental health and wellbeing is really important following bereavement and you will need to find ways of taking care of yourself that work for you. There is no right way to grieve and it is normal to find that others around you may respond differently. Following a bereavement, it is also normal to find that your behaviour may change, and you could notice yourself feeling more tired, having difficulty concentrating or losing interest in some of your routines or usual activities.

It is essential to ensure that you allow yourself time to grieve and remember the person who has died. You may also need to think about when the right time will be to return to work. It is important to only return to work when it feels right to you and to remember that stress and feeling overwhelmed are not a reflection on your ability to do your job.

In the first instance talk to your line manager to discuss what you might need in terms of support from Acorns. This will enable your manager to plan and support you in your work and to think about any adjustments that may be helpful to your normal role and work routines; for example you may feel that a phased return to work would be beneficial. Your manager will also be able to support you in accessing any additional support that you might need.

As a children's hospice, Acorns is mindful that throughout your working day and across the organisation you will be confronted by issues of loss, grief and bereavement and it is acknowledged that this can be particularly difficult for staff who are dealing with

their own bereavement. At times you may find yourself affected by hearing someone else's experiences of loss or grief, particularly if it resonates with your own and for this reason it can be helpful to identify a trusted colleague who you can talk to when your day is more difficult.

It will be helpful to have regular conversations with your manager, so that together you can monitor how things are going at work and to think about any arrangements that might further support you. It will be vital that, during this time, you ensure you get plenty of rest and are able to take regular breaks during your working day and opportunity to relax between shifts.

Grief can take time and sometimes the emotional impact of a bereavement may not be apparent for some time. It can therefore be helpful to think about what support will be useful now, and in the future, and to plan both short term and longer term with your manager. Remember, be kind to yourself and don't worry if it takes you some time to adjust to your loss, your manager will be able to support you and provide you with information that will help make things more manageable for you.

Bereavement Support during Covid-19

Guidance for line managers

When a member of your team is bereaved it is likely they will need additional support from you as their manager. This may include compassionate leave, staff support or flexible working opportunities. Open communication and a compassionate approach is vital to enable staff to feel supported following a bereavement, with space to talk through their needs and possible adjustments, that may be beneficial in supporting them within their role.

It is important to remember that everyone grieves differently and that there is no time frame for grief. Your team member may therefore need different types of support over time. We recognise that our people may experience issues of loss, grief and bereavement on a daily basis and as such it is important to find out how this may be impacting the team member and to think about supportive measures that can be put in place.

Managers should ensure that they are familiar with and understand Acorns policy for absence from work, flexible work options and support mechanisms so that they can be responsive to the needs of their team member. Liaison with the Human Resources team will also be essential to ensure that they are updated on any periods of absence or changes to role.

It is essential that managers acknowledge the bereavement as soon as feasible and talk to their team member to find out how they would like to stay in contact. Managers should ensure that this is done in a sensitive way taking care that contact remains non-intrusive and mindful of the needs of the team member. To maintain privacy, it is also important to explore what (if anything) the team member would like communicated with their colleagues.

Taking a proactive approach can be helpful for a staff member or volunteer following bereavement. Consideration should be given to whether a phased return or temporary adjustment of duties may help support a return to work. It is also important to remain open to the idea of time limited flexible working options which may support with the needs of the team member, their family and possible new caring responsibilities.

Ensure regular conversations are held once the team member has returned to work, recognising that bereavement and grief may present at different times and stages and that both short and long term support plans should be developed together.

It may be helpful to signpost the team member to bereavement support services or resources that may help them to process their grief. Remember everyone's experience of bereavement and grief is unique to them and each person will experience different feelings at different times, so regular follow ups and checks should be built into any supervision or support system you have in place, to ensure that wellbeing is monitored. Acorns is a place of care and compassion, and to enable staff and volunteers to support children and families, it is important that they also feel well supported and nurtured.

If an Acorns staff member has died their line manager will be supported by the HR team in breaking the news sensitively to their colleagues. Finding a quiet place for the conversation and space for staff to grieve needs to be considered. You will also need to consider ways staff can pay their respects, following discussion with the deceased family this may include contributing to a book of condolences. Managers may consider it appropriate to also offer staff support.

We hope this leaflet is helpful, if you need more advice you can

- > Access support from Acorns Employee Assistance Programme (Available to all Acorns staff) Available 24/7, 365 days a year for telephoning counselling support. To access the Employee Assistance Programme in confidence call **0800 107 6147** (quote BHSF) or to access the online portal visit **www.colleaguesupport.co.uk** (enter code 72135 as your username and password).
- > Contact your GP
- > Access support from Cruse Bereavement services at **www.cruse.org.uk**