**Responding to grief and bereavement from Covid-19**

**Introduction**

We all are being affected in some way by the worldwide Covid-19 pandemic. For most of us, the effect is mainly about the restrictions to our lives during the lockdown. For many there has also been some sort of impact on our work and studies. We are having to learn to adjust to this temporary situation, adapting to strains it places on our physical and mental wellbeing. However, for some of us Covid-19 also means that we have lost loved ones, acquaintances or perhaps have had our own health threatened by the virus. Over time many of us may personally experience loss through our own grief or need to support someone else who is grieving.

**Covid-19 and Bereavement**

Whilst the mortality rate of Covid-19 seems to be relatively low, with less than 1% succumbing to the illness, over time we know that many Leeds Beckett students and employees may be affected.

A death from Covid-19 may mean that there has been or will be:

* little time to prepare for a loved one’s illness or death;
* possibly coping with multiple people ill or having died from Covid-19;
* limited contact due to the risk of infection and social distancing rules;
* limited ability to say goodbye due to attendance and/or travel restrictions to funerals and wakes;
* having to grieve apart from others or even in isolation;
* practical challenges, such as caring for or being cared for whilst ill or bereaved due to Covid-19.

Early support and care for bereaved people can mean that it is easier, over time, to make a recovery with good mental health. ‘Recovery’ means enabling bereaved people to make the journey from grieving to remembering.

**Caring is not a profession**

You do not need to be a professional or have significant training or experience to give help and support. Plain kindness and loving behaviours can be a big help to bereaved people but doing so can bring challenges, including how to look after your own wellbeing.

This guide is intended for our Leeds Beckett community, colleagues and students, to help you meet those challenges by directing bereaved people and those caring for bereaved people to appropriate support and help which is free and easily accessible.

**Support from Leeds Beckett**

Our Chaplains and Wellbeing Practitioners have experience of supporting people in times of grief, loss and bereavement. With us you can explore how grief is affecting you and consider strategies for coping.

**Chaplaincy**

The Chaplaincy is here for staff and students. All conversations are confidential. Chaplains are available:

* Whether you have a faith (Christian, Jewish, Muslim etc.) or have no religious beliefs.
* When you need someone independent and confidential to talk to.
* If you're finding life difficult or you have a tricky decision to make.
* If you have lost someone close to you.
* If want to explore spirituality.

They will not try to make you religious, they are here to help you in any way that they can.

A message from **Melvyn Kelly, University Chaplain**

*“Please forgive me a personal reflection in these difficult days of isolation. My heart is breaking at the moment. Let me explain why.*

*I have been a Christian minister for 25 years now. During that time, I have conducted many, many funerals and sought to bring comfort to grieving families.*

*Much of the comfort that we find in our grief comes from those around us, from family and friends. We find strength from those who stand alongside us in our loss. We find joy, even through tears, when we share with one another happy memories of those who have died. We begin to work through our grief by talking to one another about the loved one we miss, about how we are feeling. An important part of the grieving process comes with the opportunity for us to say our ‘goodbyes’. And all of these are things that we do especially when we gather for a funeral.*

*There are common things that bring us together on those occasions: love and remembrance. At a funeral we gather in love for the one who has died, in love for those who share our loss, and in a loving desire to stand alongside one another, especially those whose grief is most raw. Remembrance unites us as we recall the life of the person who has died and reflect upon how our lives have been enriched by having known them. For some people a third factor unites them: a comfort and an assurance that comes from shared faith. All of these things become all the more important when a death is, as in the case of deaths as a result of this virus, sudden, unexpected and in traumatic circumstances.*

*My heart is breaking because none of these usual networks of support and comfort is available to us in bereavement in these days of isolation. Funerals cannot be conducted in places of worship, only a very small number of people are able to attend a funeral ceremony and such ceremonies are necessarily being restricted in form and length. Many, many people who would normally want to be present at the funeral of a loved one are unable to do so. It is truly heart-breaking.*

*All the more then, we shall need to be there for one another. All the more, it will be important to be in contact with and be available to our partners, families, friends and colleagues, coming alongside them in whatever way and by whatever means is possible. We should never underestimate the value of talking to someone about how we are feeling nor should we ever underestimate the value of listening to someone who needs our support.*

*Thankfully there is a great deal of specialist support out there too, should we need it. University support for staff and students, the chaplaincy, bereavement support from organisations like Cruse Bereavement Care, from faith leaders (where appropriate), from your GP and so on.*

*No-one should feel they have to deal with bereavement or loss on their own. I hope that we can all find ways of playing our part. Perhaps in these days more than ever before, it will be important to post a personal card or letter sending condolences and sympathy to the bereaved. Perhaps, for all its faults, social media will become a valued means of remembering those we have lost, of celebrating their life among us and honouring their memory?”*

Please contact Revd Melvyn J Kelly at [**Melvyn.Kelly@leedsbeckett.ac.uk**](mailto:Melvyn.Kelly@leedsbeckett.ac.uk) to access support.

24/7 emergency phone service on **(0113) 343 5071**.

**Helpful Advice for covid-19 related bereavement**

The charity **Sudden** provides help for suddenly-bereaved people, due to COVID-19, or any other illness, sudden event, or suicide. If you have been bereaved, or you are caring for someone who has been bereaved, please visit call **0800 2600400** or visit [www.sudden.org](http://www.sudden.org) to talk to someone or to access helpful resources.

**Cruse Bereavement Care** is a national bereavement support charity providing information about:

[Coronavirus: dealing with bereavement and grief](https://www.cruse.org.uk/get-help/coronavirus-dealing-bereavement-and-grief)

[Coronavirus: what to say when someone is grieving](https://www.cruse.org.uk/get-help/coronavirus/coronavirus-what-say-when-someone-grieving)

[Coronavirus: grieving and isolation](https://www.cruse.org.uk/coronavirus/grieving-and-isolation)

**Mindwell Leeds** is a website providing local and national information relating to mental health, including sudden bereavement<https://www.mindwell-leeds.org.uk/myself/feeling-unwell/i-am-experiencing-bereavement-or-loss>

**Leeds Beckett Student Services**

In addition to chaplaincy support, students have access to the **Student Wellbeing Team** which is a multi-disciplinary team made up of counsellors and mental health practitioners with expertise in bereavement support.

Many students who have been bereaved due to COVID-19 may not want to register with Student Wellbeing and, indeed, this may not be appropriate or necessary during the early stages of bereavement. Student Wellbeing can provide informal support to students who can contact the team, or colleagues can do this on their behalf with their consent. Students will only be asked to register with the service if it seems that they may need formal counselling or mental health support.

The Student Wellbeing Team can be contacted on **(0113) 812 8507** or at **studentwellbeing@leedsbeckett.ac.uk**

The [Student Wellbeing webpages](https://www.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/studenthub/student-wellbeing-team/) have lots of self-help resources and information about how to access support.

Leeds Beckett students also have access to **Kooth Student** – an online student support service providing guidance, moderated forums and IM counselling. This can be accessed via [student.kooth.com](http://student.kooth.com) and is available 7 days a week.

A bereavement is likely to have a significant impact on studies and Leeds Beckett University has published a [special webpage](https://www.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/covid-19/#tabplaceholder2) with information and advice for students and colleagues. This page is regularly updated to keep students, colleagues, and the wider community informed of the latest advice from our university and the UK Government.

The webpage contains information for all students about teaching, mitigation, facilities and services, accommodation, and the support that is available. However, if students feel that they haven’t received the necessary assurance that they are looking for from the webpage, they should always make contact with their Course Director or course team.

**Support for colleagues**

In addition to chaplaincy support, colleagues have free and confidential access to the Employee Assistance Programme. If you need support or advice, contact Health Assured 24 hours a day, 7 days a week on 0800 0305182, visit the [online portal](https://healthassuredeap.co.uk/wp-content/plugins/healthassured/sl.php?lg=leedsbeckett&lp=university&lid=996) or download the App. Log on with username: leedsbeckett and password: university

The [Colleague Wellbeing webpages](https://www.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/staffsite/services/human-resources/working-here/wellbeing-and-occupational-health/) have lots of information, resources and support for your wellbeing.

Leeds Beckett University has published a [special webpage](https://www.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/covid-19/#tabplaceholder2) with information and advice for students and colleagues. This page is regularly updated to keep students, colleagues, and the wider community informed of the latest coronavirus advice from our university and the UK Government.

**Managers’ information**

Taking a compassionate and empathetic approach will ensure that your employee feels supported when they have experienced a bereavement. Here are some steps that you can follow:

* Acknowledge the bereavement and offer your condolences. Acknowledging the bereavement is important, but the employee may or may not want to talk about the situation in detail. Speak to them about how much they feel able to share.
* Ask how much information about the bereavement, if anything, they would like to be shared with colleagues. Also, ask the employee if they wish to be contacted by colleagues.
* Be mindful of diversity – different cultures and religions may require the observation of particular practices such as mourning rituals following a bereavement.
* Make the employee aware of our provisions for Bereavement and Funeral Leave, as outlined in our Time Off for Public Duties & Special Leave Policy.
* Signpost the employee to support available through our Employee Assistance Programme, Health Assured, our Chaplaincy Services and our Colleague Wellbeing pages, all highlighted above.
* Highlight external support available through their GP or bereavement organisations and charities. Again, this is highlighted above.
* If a colleague is absent from work due to experiencing a bereavement, then a conversation with them about when they anticipate a return to work may not be appropriate at first. However, it is important to start a dialogue which allows an open discussion around how they are coping and when they may be ready to return, and if any adjustments would assist with this; for example a phased return to work or flexible working.

Should you have any questions or need any assistance in supporting colleagues, please contact your HR Adviser, or email [employeerelationsteam@leedsbeckett.ac.uk](mailto:employeerelationsteam@leedsbeckett.ac.uk)