

# UNIVERSITY OF TWENTE GUIDELINE FOR GRIEF ASSISTANCE FOR MANAGERS

HR

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UNIVERSITY OF TWENTE.



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# INTRODUCTION

The immediate or impending loss of a loved one can significantly affect an employee's well-being and work performance. Getting lost in a tangle of leave regulations is the last thing needed in such times. Employees benefit most from an employer who understands and is responsive to their needs. As everyone grieves differently, tailored support is essential. Some employees may be completely unable to work, while others find that work provides necessary structure and distraction. Cultural factors can also shape how individuals cope with the loss of a loved one. By paying attention to the employee's work-related needs, suitable arrangements can be made to ensure the employee both feels and experiences support in the workplace from their manager and colleagues.

# PURPOSE

This Guideline for Grief Assistance offers advice to managers on how to respond effectively when a team member<sup>1</sup> faces the immediate or impending loss of a loved one. This Guideline stems from an agreement laid down in Article E.23 of the Collective Labour Agreement for Dutch Universities (1 April 2023 - 30 June 2024), in which it is provided that “the universities and the Local Consultation will expand on the collective labour agreement by preparing a guideline for compassionate leave that both employers and employees can refer to. This guideline will set out what the options for compassionate leave are, taking into account the affected employee’s specific situation, and focusing on their safe and sound return to work”. The decision to refer to a guideline ‘for grief assistance’ instead of a guideline ‘for compassionate leave’ was made to reflect the comprehensive nature of supporting an employee in mourning. Compassionate leave (see box) can be applied as part of grief support and counselling when appropriate, depending on the situation.

## THE PERIOD PRIOR TO DEATH

In the period leading up to a loved one’s death, grief may already be felt, especially during the demanding palliative phase. During this time, an employee might want to focus solely on caregiving, making work seem extremely stressful or unmanageable. Employee and manager may agree between them to plan time off to spend with the loved one in their final phase of life. In specific situations, short-term and/or long-term care leave may be appropriate. In other cases, temporary adjustments to working hours and activities can be agreed upon. Certain aspects listed below under ‘the period following death’, such as informing colleagues and taking over or cancelling work, appointments or previously made commitments, may also apply to the period prior to death.

## THE PERIOD FOLLOWING DEATH

### CONTACT WITH EMPLOYEE AFTER NEWS OF DEATH

As a manager, it is important to contact the employee promptly to convey condolences and briefly discuss relevant issues, such as:

- Which colleagues should be informed?
- Are there any urgent matters that need to be taken over or things that need to be cancelled?
- Does short-term leave due to ‘family circumstances’ apply (see [Leave Regulations University of Twente](#) regarding the length of leave with full pay to be granted)?
- Contact moments to make further arrangements.

### PRACTICAL MATTERS

- Send a sympathy card and/or flowers to convey condolences.
- Would any colleagues like to attend the funeral? If so, make arrangements for this and check with the employee if it’s acceptable.

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<sup>1</sup> This guideline is specifically intended for situations where an employee has lost a loved one. In the case of the death of an employee, the [protocol following the death of a member of the UT community](#) sets out which steps should be followed.

## CONTACT WITH EMPLOYEE AFTER THE FUNERAL

The manager (or other contact person, if agreed) should contact the employee at the previously agreed time. The aim is to facilitate an easy return to work, ask how the employee is doing and decide on the next steps together.

- Ask how the employee is doing.
- Indicate your readiness to work together on how to facilitate the employee's return to work.
- Ask specifically about the employee's needs and listen to them. Don't decide yourself what the employee needs.
- Ask if the employee needs support, whether from the manager themselves, a close colleague, or possibly from an external provider.
- Where necessary, make arrangements for adjusted work, working hours, or compassionate leave (see box).
- Bear in mind that every situation is different and that a tailored approach can be essential. The HR adviser can provide input or advice, where needed.

### Compassionate Leave

- If an employee has lost a close family member (e.g. child or partner), the manager may, if necessary and in addition to the leave provided for in Article 10(c) to (f) of the Leave Regulations University of Twente, as applicable, grant compassionate leave with full pay for up to four (4) times the employee's weekly working hours. This is to be agreed between the manager and the employee, taking into account the necessity, scope, duration and the way in which the compassionate leave is used.
- The determination of the need for, necessary duration, scope and nature of compassionate leave will be guided by the principles of being a responsible employer and a conscientious employee.
- If the period of up to 4 times the employee's weekly working hours is not sufficient, additional options will be considered, such as using leave hours, working fewer hours (on a temporary basis), unpaid leave or other extraordinary leave in accordance with Article 4.25 of the Collective Labour Agreement for Dutch Universities.
- Compassionate leave can be split or spread over a longer period, as it might be possible for the employee to work, but not full days or weeks initially.

Please note: Compassionate leave is always tailored to take in?? account of individual circumstances. Compassionate leave is designed for situations where the loss of a loved one significantly affects an employee. This might involve the loss of a child or partner the loss of someone else from an employee's immediate environment.

## WHEN THE EMPLOYEE HAS RETURNED TO WORK

Remember that everyone grieves differently and their needs might change over time. It is therefore important that you maintain open and positive dialogue regarding the employee's capacity to work.

- Offer support by listening carefully, being attentive and showing understanding.
- Ask how today or the past few days have been. What issues is the employee encountering? What has been going well for the employee, and what difficulties are they experiencing?

- Recognise that grieving can drain one’s energy. Help the employee discover and as far as possible engage in activities that energise them.
- Where necessary, an external provider can be engaged:
  - For grief support for the grieving employee, the absenteeism and reintegration advisor can be contacted (via the HR advisor).
  - If the employee experiences or anticipates any health issues, inform them about the option of a preventive consultation (occupational health consultation) with the occupational health and safety (OH&S) service.
  - If you want to know more, as a manager, about supporting a grieving employee or would like guidance for a team experiencing grief and loss, assistance is available through the [Career Development Centre](#).
- Make agreements for the coming period: in follow-up meetings, evaluate how things are going. Keep in mind that the grieving process can be unpredictable, and the employee’s needs for balancing grief and work may change frequently. Remember also to ask the employee regularly to let you know if the current agreements are not helpful, so that you can consider alternative options. You can also seek to agree on a starting point for the employee’s full return to work.
- Be flexible in modifying agreements where necessary and also pay extra attention to the employee over time, e.g. after the first six months.

## SUPPORT FOR MANAGER

When an employee loses a loved one, tailored support is essential. This guideline offers advice on how to provide support and counselling most effectively. Don’t hesitate to contact the HR adviser if you need additional support or have any questions.

## ADOPTION AND ENTRY INTO FORCE

This guideline was adopted by the Executive Board on 30 September 2024, following agreement in the Local Consultation of 19 September 2024. The guideline will enter into force on 30 September 2024.

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