



Bereavement and Compassionate Leave Policy and Procedure

Version 3.1

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<p>Name and Title of Author:</p>	<p>Lisa Longstaff, Director of People</p>
<p>Name of Responsible Committee/Individual:</p>	<p>Executive Board</p>
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<p>References:</p>	<p>ACAS Guide on Managing Bereavement in the Workplace Family Leave Policy Health and Wellbeing Policy Flexible Working Policy www.dyingtowork.co.uk www.bluecross.org.uk Special Leave Policy</p>

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POLICY STATEMENT

We are here to make great schools and happier, stronger communities so that people have better lives. We do this by:

- Always doing what is right
- Trusting in each other and standing shoulder to shoulder
- Doing what we know makes the difference

Doing what is right means always acting with integrity, in the interests of others and being honest, open and transparent.

We recognise that employees will from time to time, face exceptional circumstances which require time off. We will deal with all requests respectfully, discreetly and swiftly. This may be where an employee is affected by a bereavement, where a family member or close friend is receiving end of life care, or where an employee has been diagnosed with a terminal illness.

While this policy does not extend to pets, we recognise the impact that the death of a pet may have and will support our staff sensitively, which may include ad hoc day(s) of paid leave. Relate has advice and sign-posting detailed on their website (www.relate.org.uk) including Blue Cross, who offer pet loss support (www.bluecross.org.uk).

1. SCOPE

This policy applies to all staff employed by The Education Alliance (TEAL).

2. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The **Executive Board** is responsible for approving this policy.

Headteachers are responsible for ensuring that staff and managers adhere to this procedure in their schools. They are also responsible for monitoring the effectiveness and application of this policy, ensuring there is a caring, compassionate, dignified, consistent, fair and reasonable approach to the management of bereavement leave requests, and the support available to staff experiencing bereavement and terminal illness.

The **Human Resources Department** is responsible for ensuring that employees have access to this policy and that managers and employees apply it fairly and consistently.

Managers and staff with supervisory or leadership responsibilities must ensure they implement this policy fairly and equitably, with care and compassion, seeking guidance, clarification and support as and when required.

Employees are encouraged to reach out when they need support, read this policy, adhere to the processes detailed and seek clarity from either their manager or the HR Department if they have any queries.

3. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

TEAL is committed to:

- Promoting equality and diversity in its policies, procedures and guidelines

- Delivering high quality teaching and services that meet the diverse needs of its pupil population and its workforce, ensuring that no individual or group is disadvantaged

We recognise that different cultures respond to death in significantly different ways. Line managers are encouraged to check whether the employee's religion or culture requires them to observe any particular practices or make special arrangements, which would necessitate them, being off work at a particular time. Employees should not assume that their line manager is aware of any such requirements and should draw this to their line manager's attention as soon as possible.

4. PRINCIPLES

We aim to support employees experiencing bereavement and grief in a compassionate, caring way, acting fairly, reasonably and consistently, with an understanding that grief affects people in different ways, emotionally, physically and psychologically. It can affect people's thoughts, sleep patterns, emotional state, behaviours, and levels of concentration, resilience and energy. Fluctuations in mental, physical and emotional states often occur, and it is important that managers seek the information they need in a sensitive way, understanding that a calm, empathic, supportive approach is crucial.

5. MANAGING BEREAVEMENT IN THE WORKPLACE

Whilst managers and staff responsible for cover arrangements in schools, require key information to manage absence effectively, we also appreciate that employee's experiencing grief may struggle to provide much information. There may be occasions where an employee feels unable to communicate directly, and they may initially seek someone to do this on their behalf. We encourage managers and those in contact with employees experiencing grief (e.g. staff responsible for cover in schools) to:

- Offer their condolences, offering support in a caring and compassionate way
- Ask the employee how they would like to stay in touch (e.g. text, email, telephone)
- Check if there are particular days/times to avoid contact
- Ask how much information they would like to be shared with others (e.g. colleagues and students)
- A conversation about the employee's anticipated return to work may not be appropriate in the first few days of bereavement, however, starting a dialogue about how they are coping, the policy on bereavement, the support they may be able to access, can be useful (e.g. the employee assistance programme, which is accessible 24/7 and is free for employees to access and confidential)

Regular reviews are encouraged to allow the manager and the bereaved employee to discuss and agree any strategies or adjustments, which may be helpful in enabling employees to return to work, and to support them in the workplace after their return. Managers are encouraged to discuss options with HR, to consider what is feasible and how such arrangements may be managed effectively. This might lead to a temporary or long-term change in, for example, hours or responsibilities.

We understand that bereavement sometimes results in changes in the personal and financial circumstances of the bereaved employee. An employee who loses their partner, for example, may become responsible for raising their children as a single parent. An employee whose sibling dies may take on caring responsibilities for an elderly parent. Financial information can be accessed freely and confidentially through the employee assistance programme, and HR Departments can signpost employees requiring additional support and information.

If employees have concerns about the changes they face, they may wish to talk to their manager and the HR Department, and their trade union, who may be able to offer suggestions, additional guidance and information, and seek to help the employee adapt to those changes and plan for the future. TEAL has a Flexible Working Policy, which enables staff to request changes to their working conditions and working patterns and arrangements, either temporarily or permanently.

6. TERMINAL ILLNESS

Sadly, terminal illness affects people of all ages. We have an open, inclusive and supportive culture, and we aim to equip our managers and colleagues to have sensitive and supportive conversations with terminally ill colleagues. We encourage terminally ill employees to reach out and together we can explore the support they need, which is likely to change over time, and will therefore require regular review. Support may include reasonable adjustments (e.g. changes to duties/working pattern), flexible working, changes to duties, time off for medical appointments, access to a range of supportive services (e.g. employee assistance programme, which includes access to financial and legal information) and financial security (e.g. working with our pension providers).

We recognise that employees with a terminal illness may have financial concerns, including their ability to remain at work to enable their families to access any death in service benefits (subject to the terms of their pension provider). They are likely to also have social, welfare, legal and mental wellbeing needs, such as knowing how to apply for benefits, making a will, funeral arrangements, and as a caring and compassionate employer, we are committed to managing employees with a terminal illness with support and understanding, maintaining their employment if that is their wish, and providing staff with safe and reasonable work. Such situations will be supported in line with our Health and Wellbeing policy.

We are mindful of the wider impact terminal illness can have on colleagues and we have a range of support available to colleagues of terminally ill employees.

7. PREGNANCY AND BABY LOSS

The trust is committed to supporting all employees who suffer the loss of a pregnancy, whether it happens directly to them, their partner or their baby's surrogate, regardless of the nature of their loss, gestation of pregnancy, or their length of service. Pregnancy loss includes but is not limited to miscarriage, stillbirth, abortion, ectopic pregnancy, molar pregnancy, termination for medical reasons, and neonatal loss.

All employees and partners who sadly experience pregnancy loss, which occurs before the 16th week before the Expected Week of Childbirth (EWC) (i.e. before 24 weeks) are entitled to take paid time off from work in line with this policy. We recognise that everyone experiences loss differently, and the time employees may need away from work will vary. If an employee were to unfortunately experience recurrent pregnancy loss this entitlement to leave would apply to each case.

In the sad event of a pregnancy loss occurring after 24 weeks of pregnancy, or in the case of still birth or the death of a child during the maternity leave period, the employee will be entitled to all the maternity and paternity pay and leave entitlements as set out in the Family Leave policy.

8. REQUESTS FOR BEREAVEMENT AND COMPASSIONATE LEAVE

There may be occasions where staff require compassionate leave (e.g. where there is end of life care and an employee requests time to be with their loved one). It is difficult to predict the period of time an employee may require, and we will endeavour to support them with paid compassionate leave. Requests for bereavement and compassionate leave can be submitted via the absence/cover arrangements in place in their school. If an employee experiences a bereavement or imminent end of life in their immediate family, they should notify the school of their immediate need for time off, either via their line manager or the absence line. Where employees seek time off to attend a funeral, make arrangements for a funeral or travel to and from a funeral, they should talk to their line manager and submit their request via the cover/HR team. Requests for time off due to bereavement or compassionate leave should be considered in a supportive and caring manner, and decisions should be shared in an empathic, kind, considerate way. Managers are encouraged to seek HR advice.

Bereavement leave is paid leave that allows an employee time off to deal with their personal distress and related practical arrangements, primarily, but not limited to, when a member of their immediate family dies. We recognise that bereavement affects all individuals differently, and accordingly the time employees may need away from work will vary. We wish to be supportive and caring in such difficult circumstances, and paid bereavement leave will be granted for employees coping with the death of a close family member.

Where employees require time off to attend a funeral, make funeral arrangements, or travel to and from a funeral, they are encouraged to provide their manager with as much information as is reasonably possible, to enable the request to be fully considered and an informed decision to be made.

We will respond to bereavement issues with discretion, sensitivity and care. We recognise that in some circumstances, bereavement results in our employees being involvement in reviewing practical arrangements at home, particularly where employees find they have changing circumstances, such as increased levels of caring responsibilities, resulting from the death of a family member. Employees are encouraged to share as much information as they feel able to, to ensure they can be supported effectively.

9. RETURN TO WORK

In some circumstances, a full return to work may not be possible for an employee following the death of a close relative. For example, where an employee feels their grief is likely to impact on their ability to perform their role, or where new childcare arrangements have to be sourced, or responsibility for the care of an elderly parent has transferred to the employee.

In such instances, the employee is encouraged to discuss options with their line manager, who should seek advice from the HR Department. Depending on the circumstances, we may be able to facilitate a phased return to work, and/or consider a request for flexible working. We acknowledge that bereavement leave is intended to support employees in the immediate period around the death of a relative. However, the process of grief, the natural reaction and adjustment to loss and change may take a significant time and will be personal to each individual.

An employee with any concerns about the grieving process affecting their work performance should discuss this in confidence with either their line manager or the HR Department, to ensure that any reasonable adjustments that may be necessary are discussed and that the employee is supported in their return to work.

10. APPEALS

If an employee believes they have been unfairly treated, they may wish to appeal against the decision regarding their bereavement leave request. The employee must submit their appeal to the HR Department within 10 working days of receipt of the decision, clearly stating the grounds for their appeal.

The Headteacher or a member of the Executive Team will review the original documentation and decision alongside any additional information submitted and will either make a decision and write to the employee or will arrange an appeal meeting, which will be heard by the Headteacher or a member of the Executive Team.

The outcome of the appeal is final.

11. MONITORING COMPLIANCE WITH AND EFFECTIVENESS OF THE POLICY

Effectiveness and compliance of this procedure will be monitored on an annual basis by the HR Department.

12. REVIEW

This Procedure will be reviewed within 3 years of the date of implementation with trade unions via the JCNC.

Appendix of policy updates following each review

November 2024

The Bereavement and Compassionate Leave Policy and Procedure has been reviewed and updated in line with our policy renewal procedure.

The policy enables our staff to access support and paid leave when they face bereavement of a close friend or family member. The overriding principle that staff can take the time that they need, and that this will vary for each situation, remains unchanged.

The following updates have been made to the policy:

- Policy now includes a commitment to applying the principles of the national Dying to Work charter. In particular, a commitment to retain staff in employment if that if their wish, to enable access to any death in service benefits for their family.
- Inclusion of bereavement leave extending to pregnancy and baby loss, in line with Family Leave policy.
- Explicit reference to ad hoc paid days of leave being available for staff who experience the death of a pet. A request for reference to death of pets came from trade union colleagues, albeit not unanimously. The policy change aims to enable a compassionate yet proportionate response.
- Small changes to language to emphasise the caring approach staff can expect from their employer.