

Death of an Employee Response Plan

The death of an employee is a traumatic event that may greatly affect the workplace, and is always a difficult and emotional time. As a leader, it is important to be aware of responses to grief and be prepared to support your staff. The CU/CUIMC Human Resources teams are available to provide support to employees and their respective schools and departments. What follows is a checklist that schools and departments should follow after the unfortunate death of an employee.

Death of an Employee—A Checklist

1) STAGE ONE – IMMEDIATE RESPONSE AND COMMUNICATION

If death (or serious accident/illness) of an employee or affiliate occurs at work or on University Property:

- Contact 911
- Notify Public Safety for the appropriate campus at:
 - Morningside Campus: 212-854-5555
 - Manhattanville Campus: 212-854-3333
 - Medical Center: 212-305-7979
 - Lamont Doherty Earth Observatory: 845-359-2900
 - Baker Athletics Complex: 212-854-5555
 - Nevis Laboratories: 914-591-2870
- Clear the area and relocate any necessary functions to a different area until emergency personnel can clear the decedent.
- Provide emergency contact information to the police, who will notify the next of kin. If you do not have the emergency contact information, contact your Senior HR Business Partner and they will contact Public Safety/Police directly.

If death occurs off campus:

A Columbia affiliate (faculty members, staff members, students) may hear of an off-campus death through various sources: a friend, family, a student, an employee, the news, an obituary, etc. In such cases, the following steps should be followed:

- The Columbia affiliate should contact the deceased employee's local HR to relay the information.

- Local HR should notify the staff with the most critical need, including the manager or supervisor, Department Administrator, Department Chair and/or Department Designee and central CU/CUIMC Human Resources
- Provide resources:
 - Remind employees that Employee Assistance Program has counselors available to talk them through the stress and grief they might experience.
 - The EAP is also available for group counseling sessions for those directly affected by the employee's death.
 - Your HRBP can contact the EAP to discuss the needs of your department to determine counseling/intervention that can be made available.
- Be flexible and provide grieving employees time off as needed.

2) STAGE TWO – THE FIRST 24 HOURS AFTER A DEATH IS REPORTED

Departmental Human Resources Representative/Columbia University/CUIMC Human Resources Actions:

- The Departmental Human Resources representative confirms the report. In addition, the Departmental Human Resources representative connects with the emergency contact family member of the deceased employee.
- The Departmental Human Resources representative notifies their Senior Human Resources Business partner.
- Departmental Human Resources and departmental management meets with employees, preferably in-person, as soon as possible. Notify immediate staff and close work friends directly – and privately – before making a general announcement. Share only the details the family has consented to be shared. Contact your Sr. HRBP for guidance.
 - If appropriate to their relationship, contact staff who may be away or on leave.
 - Communicate the family's wishes regarding flowers or donations in lieu of flowers.
 - Designate an internal contact person for employees who have any questions or concerns, to prevent employees from trying to contact the family directly.
- The Departmental Human Resources representative will discuss with the Senior Human Resources Business Partner about organizing counseling sessions with the University's EAP provider, either in-person or virtually. The Senior Human Resources Business Partner will contact the EAP provider to begin making the arrangements for counseling and support.
- The Senior Human Resources Business Partner contacts Central HR Benefits to inform them of the employee's passing. Central HR Benefits will assign a contact person in the department to initiate communication with the family member identified as the emergency contact. The Central HR Benefits representative will contact the family to arrange a meeting to discuss the employee's benefits eligibility.
- The Senior Human Resources Business Partner contacts Central HR Payroll to inform them of the employee's passing. Central HR Payroll will calculate and coordinate the final payment.
- The Departmental Human Resources representative will write a notification about the employee's passing, to be sent to co-workers within the School/Department. Consideration

should also be made for notifying other employees/students/faculty members/alumni who may be impacted to make them aware of the employee's passing. No communication should go out without the approval from the Office of Internal Communications at Columbia University or CUIMC Communications. (Sample communications provided below.)

- The Senior Human Resources Business Partner contacts CUIT to inform them of the employee's passing. The Senior Human Resources Business Partner will discuss with CUIT and arrange for an appropriate email reply message to be created and sent to anyone emailing the deceased employee.
- The Senior Human Resources Business Partner will inquire if the deceased employee was also a Columbia University student. If so, the Senior Human Resources Business Partner will contact the Dean's Office of that school to inform them about the employee's passing.

3) STAGE THREE – 24 to 48 Hours After a Death is Reported

Departmental Human Resources Representative

- The Departmental Human Resources Representative prepares a condolence communication to the family.
- In some instances, Departmental Human Resources should work with the Office of Internal Communications regarding releasing information and developing an announcement to campus.
- The Departmental Human Resources Representative will assess the need for and discuss a memorial event within the department.
- The Departmental Human Resources Representative collects information about arrangements for the deceased employee, shares this information with the deceased employee's colleagues, and discusses any particular information regarding attendance at these arrangements with the family.
- If Departmental Human Resources would like to send flowers, make contributions, etc., please contact your Senior Human Resources Business Partner.

4) STAGE FOUR – FINAL WAGES/BENEFITS PROCESSING

Departmental Human Resources Representative

- The Departmental Human Resources Representative ensures that a PAF is completed to change the employee's status. Should include the Death Certificate if available.
- Arrange to have personal possessions inventoried and delivered to the employee's family.
- Arrange to have any Columbia University property retrieved from the family. If necessary, the Departmental Human Resources representative discusses the appropriate timing with the Senior Human Resources Business Partner.

BEREAVEMENT RESOURCES FOR DEPARTMENT LEADERSHIP

The below resources are available for Morningside, Manhattanville, and CUIMC campuses

Cope Columbia: When faced with trauma, grief, and loss, self-care becomes critically important. Cope Columbia encourages faculty and staff to take advantage of their mental health resources located here: <https://www.cuimc.columbia.edu/faculty-staff-resources/cuimc-well-being-initiative/copecolumbia>

Telus Health Employee Assistant Program (EAP) Resources

- **Phone:** 844-636-1260
- **Website:** <https://one.telushealth.com/>
User Name: columbia **Password:** eap

TELUS Health EAP – Critical Incidents

Critical Incidents Report (CIR) Process:

In case of an emergency due to a Critical Incident such as a death of an employee, a department may want to set up a counseling session for a group of employees, or have a counselor come on site. Local Human Resources should contact their Sr. Human Resources Business Partner to request this service and the Sr. Human Resources Business Partner will facilitate the sessions(s) with Telus Health.

- Per Columbia policy, all Columbia CIR requests exceeding two hours, or asking for more than one counselor, require individual departments to pay for CIR services over those pre-approved limits.
- When staffing these requests, EAP Consultants need to explain these limits. They will advise that individual departments can be billed for CIR services over those pre-approved limits. This would include any "extension of time" beyond the initial two hours.
- If more than two hours is being requested, EAP Consultants inform requestor they are responsible for paying for additional hours. EAP Consultant will obtain:
 - Requestor's Name/Phone/E-Mail:
 - Requestor's Department and billing address
 - Counselor will indicate number of hours the Department will be charged (above the two) + cost per hour

Charges for services above 2 hours:

- Hourly rate is \$250 per hour, per consultant

For example: Two counselors requested for four hours = total of eight hours. Two hours are covered, Department would be billed for six hours at \$250 per hour (\$1500).

Legal consultation: No-fee consultation per concern for 30 minutes up to a 25% discount on retaining fees.

Financial Consultation: No-fee 30-60-minute appointment with an accredited professional for coaching, guidance and resources for money matters.

Other Bereavement and Grief Resources:

- **Columbia University Bereavement Pay Policy:** <https://universitypolicies.columbia.edu/content/bereavement-pay>
- **Pastoral Care at NYP:** <https://www.nyp.org/pastoral-care>
- **NY State Office of Mental Health Emotional Support:** <https://omh.ny.gov/>
- **NYC Well:** <https://nycwell.cityofnewyork.us/en/>
- **Jewish Board Bereavement Services:** Bereavement support for individuals and families 888-523-2769 | src@jbfcs.org | jewishboard.org/about-us/programs-services/jewish-communityservices/bereavement-support/
- **The Center for Prolonged Grief:** prolongedgrief.columbia.edu

Sample Communications

Example Communications:

Announcement to Staff from Dept Leadership

To: Departmental Staff

From: Chair or DA

Subject: Important Campus News (**Insert Sensitive Message Alerting Department Death**)

Dear Staff,

It is with deep sadness and regret that I write to inform you of the loss of one of our staff/faculty members. **[First and Last Name]**, one of our department's **[Job title]**, has passed away. Department leadership is in contact with their family to provide support and assistance during this difficult time. We wish to convey our heartfelt condolences to the **[Last Name]** family for their terrible loss and ask that you keep them in your thoughts in the days ahead.

With the death of **[First Name]**, *also known as XXX by friends in the department*, we grieve the loss of a caring and valued member of our community.

When we lose a member of our community, we are all affected by the loss. During this difficult time, I encourage you to rely on one another and on University resources. You may seek support from professional staff by reaching out to the Employee Assistance Program (844-636-1260) or Cope Columbian at <https://www.cuimc.columbia.edu/faculty-staff-resources/cuimc-well-being-initiative/copecolumbia>

I know we are united in mourning the loss of such a promising and inspiring member of our community.

Example: Message to All Faculty (Forwarded Staff Communication)

To: All Faculty

From: Chair or DA

Subject: Employee Death

Dear Faculty,

I want to share with you the message that was just sent out to all **[Insert Department]** staff regarding the death of a department staff member (see below **Insert previous communication** to staff). It has been a difficult day, and we are continuing to provide support to our community and the family.

In the next few days many of us will find ourselves in a situation of supporting employees who may have known **[First Name]** or those who did not know them but are struggling with coming to terms with how this could happen to a colleague. As we support our staff, which we do well, please use one another as a resource.

Thank you, everyone, for your continued support of our students and each other.