

DEFENCE FORCES BEREAVEMENT POLICY

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1. Introduction

The Defence Forces Bereavement Policy reflects the values and philosophy of the Defence Forces. In particular, it aims to provide the necessary support and guidance to all bereaved members upon receiving news of the death of a loved one. It also aims to provide the necessary support and guidance to bereaved families and colleagues upon receiving the news of the death of a serving member of the Defence Forces.

This policy aims to provide a framework for the bereaved to access all immediate supports and services. It aims to enable them to understand all necessary protocols that might exist for the family of a serving member who dies at home or overseas. The policy is designed to be sensitive to the needs of the next-of-kin and immediate family. The policy outlines entitlements for the next-of-kin and family of the bereaved and the necessary contact details for the relevant internal agencies of the Defence Forces that are available to them during this sad and difficult time.

Bereavement is an unfortunate reality that all members of the Defence Forces and their families will face at some point in their lives. Becoming aware of the effects of bereavement can help us come to terms with the notion of death and increase our own understanding of the emotional consequences of loss in others.

The Defence Forces acknowledges that all persons are different and grieve in different ways. Unit Commanders are issued with detailed guidelines to assist their understanding of bereavement and the bereaved.

Bereavement can take many forms such as natural death, an accidental or sudden death, death by suicide, the death of a baby or a miscarriage. Additionally there are other forms of grieving outside bereavement such as the breakup of a relationship, a loved one suffering from a terminal illness or a catastrophic or serious injury. Each loss is

unique to the individual and may bring its own type of grief which may have the following effects: physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual.

There is no set formula for coping with grief and the Defence Forces acknowledges the fact that each member is unique. This policy sets out some of the practical supports that have been regulated for as well as measures that may be taken on a case-by-case basis to assist the bereaved. This policy document does not set out to offer expertise in dealing with bereavement but serves merely as a map to assist personnel and their families find resources that may help with the bereavement process.

2. Leave Entitlements

Paid Leave

- a.** Special leave with pay and allowances not exceeding 5 working days may be granted to a member on the occasion of the death of a spouse or child of the member.
- b.** Special leave with pay and allowances not exceeding 5 working days may be granted to fathers in the event of a stillborn or pre-natal death of a child after 24 weeks of pregnancy.
- c.** Special leave with pay and allowances not exceeding 3 working days may be granted to a member on the occasion of the death of an immediate relative (other than a spouse or child) or, in exceptional circumstances, of a more distant relative where the member has lived for a considerable time in the same house as the deceased, up to the time of death or where the member is the only relative available to take charge of the funeral arrangements.
- d.** Special leave with pay and allowances not exceeding 1 working day may be granted to a member on the occasion of the death of an aunt, uncle, niece or nephew.
- e.** Where a member of the Permanent Defence Force has to travel abroad to make funeral arrangements in respect of an immediate relative, special leave with pay and allowances in excess of the limits prescribed in **a** and **c** above may be granted at the discretion of DCOS(Sp).

Annual Leave

- In the event of a death of an immediate relative, a member **may** be facilitated in taking annual leave at short notice to supplement their special leave. Requests of this nature should be communicated to the Unit Commander for decision.

Unpaid Leave

- A member of the Permanent Defence Force **may** be granted special leave without pay and allowances for domestic reasons at the discretion of DCOS (Sp) subject to certain conditions and upper limits. The information pertaining to unpaid special leave for domestic reasons is available in Administrative Instruction A11 Paragraph 427. It must be noted that special leave in this instance will be subject to the exigencies of the service.

3. Bereaved Personnel's Return to Duty

- a. Returning to duty following a death is one of the immediate challenges facing those who have been bereaved. Bereaved personnel can be helped enormously by both the Unit Commanders and colleagues in many small but significant ways.
- b. In certain circumstances a member may be afforded flexibility in the workplace following the death of an immediate relative. It will be assessed on a case by case basis and at the discretion of his/her commanding officer. It must be noted that facilitation in this instance will be subject to the exigencies of the service.

4. Health and Safety

- a. The health and safety of all members of the Defence Forces is a priority and is particularly important considering the environments that members may be required to work in.
- b. Any member concerned about their ability to safely conduct their duties following the loss of an immediate relative or friend, should discuss this with a colleague or a superior.
- c. Unit Commanders may request that a member of the Defence Forces meet the Defence Forces Psychologist before resuming full duties.

5. Available Supports

- a. The Chain of Command is available to assist in any way a member following bereavement. Members are encouraged to communicate to superiors and colleagues. Unit Commander's Guidelines on bereavement have also been issued to assist the Unit Commander in his duty of care for personnel under his command. This is a comprehensive aid that encompasses a large body of expertise.
- b. The Personnel Support Service (PSS) through the Barrack Personnel Support Service Officers and Occupational Social Workers provide direct support and counselling to serving members and their families who have experienced bereavement. Information is available at www.military.ie.
- c. The Defence Forces **Chaplaincy Service** provides pastoral care and spiritual support to bereaved military families on a daily basis. Their expertise and experience in the area of grief allows them the opportunity to journey with families through difficult times. They engage at all levels of faith and none and help families to organise and celebrate the lives of departed loved ones with dignity, compassion and understanding. Their knowledge of ritual and liturgy allows them to engage with families of multi-faith and none, to ensure all funeral rites and norms are afforded to the deceased in accordance with their family wishes, their beliefs or none. All bereaved families are given the supports needed to help them understand the protocols that are associated with the death of a serving member of the Defence Forces, either at home or overseas. The Service acknowledges and is respectful of the fact that no death is alike and every family is unique. Information on the Chaplaincy Service is publicly available at www.military.ie and at www.militarychaplaincy.ie.
- d. External agencies: There are a number of agencies and websites available that may be of assistance in the bereavement process. Examples of organisations that specialise in coping with bereavement are:
 - i. Bereavement Counselling Service – www.bereavementireland.com
 - ii. Irish Hospice Foundation – www.hospice-foundation.ie
 - iii. Barnardos – www.barnardos.ie
 - iv. Anam Cara – www.anamcara.ie

- v. Miscarriage Association of Ireland – www.miscarriage.ie
- vi. Rainbows Ireland – www.rainbowsireland.com
- vii. Citizens Information Board – www.citizensinformation.ie
- viii. Aftering aims to provide guides and supports to assist you through the process and planning and what comes afterwards – www.aftering.com

6. Bereaved Families

The Defence Forces is committed to supporting bereaved families where they have died in service.

Upon the death of a serving member, a Liaison Officer will be appointed to the bereaved family. The same person will remain in the role of Liaison Officer for as long as is needed and is the main point of contact between the family and the Defence Forces. The Liaison Officer will, if required, provide assistance with funeral arrangements. He/ she will guide the family on counselling services available from the PSS and Chaplaincy Service.

7. Conclusion

The Defence Forces acknowledges the personalised nature of bereavement and grief and is committed to supporting members and their families in a practical and reasonable way with all available resources. The internal support services, namely the PSS/ Occupational Social Work Team and the Chaplaincy Service provide direct support to the bereaved.

This policy, in all areas is subject to ongoing changes. Human Resource Branch (J1) is always open to constructive input which may improve this policy. Entitlements and regulations, it must also be noted, are always subject to change.

