

Time off work for bereavement

1 . Leave and pay when someone dies

Most people will experience the death of a person close to them during their working lives.

Grief is a natural response people have when they experience a death (a bereavement). It can affect someone in several ways and can impact on their ability to do their work.

Everyone experiences grief differently. It's important for employers to:

- be sensitive to what each person might need at the time
- consider the person's physical and emotional wellbeing, including once they've returned to work
- recognise that grief is not a linear process and affects everyone differently – there is no right or wrong way to grieve and it can affect people at different times following a death

If you have experienced the death of a person close to you, or you're supporting someone through a bereavement, you might be experiencing a range of emotions that are having an impact on your work.

If you'd prefer to talk to someone about the different options for leave and pay, you can [contact the Acas helpline](#).

The right to time off

Anyone with the [legal status of employee](#) has the right to time off if:

- a 'dependant' dies
- their child is stillborn or dies under the age of 18

If an employee's dependant dies

An employee has the right to time off if a dependant dies.

A dependant could be:

- their husband, wife, civil partner or partner
- their child
- their parent
- a person who lives in their household (not tenants, lodgers or employees)
- a person who relies on them, such as an elderly neighbour

There's no legal right for time off for dependants to be paid, but some employers might offer pay. Employers and employees should check the employee's contract or the organisation's policy.

How much leave can be taken

The law does not say how much time can be taken off if a dependant who is not someone's child dies. It simply says the amount should be 'reasonable'.

This time off is for dealing with unexpected issues and emergencies involving the dependant, including leave to arrange or attend a funeral.

[Find out more about the right to time off for dependants](#)

If an employee's child dies

Employees have a right to 2 weeks off if their child dies under the age of 18. They might also have the right to time off if they have a pregnancy loss. The time off is called 'parental bereavement leave' and is also known as 'Jack's Law'.

[Find out more about the right to time off if an employee's child dies](#)

Bereaved partner's paternity leave

Bereaved partner's paternity leave will become a right from 6 April 2026. It will give eligible fathers and partners up to 52 weeks' unpaid leave if the mother or primary adopter dies. This also applies to intended parents having a baby through surrogacy.

An employee must take this leave within 52 weeks of either:

- their child's birth
- their child's adoption placement
- their child's entry to Great Britain for overseas adoptions

We'll update this website with more information in April.

If the person who died was not a child or dependant

There's no legal right to time off in these circumstances.

Regardless of whether an employee has a right to time off, employers should be compassionate towards a person's individual situation. The person who has died might not have a biological or legal connection to the employee, but might still be closely connected to them.

Check your bereavement policy

If your organisation has a bereavement policy, it should say:

- when leave for bereavement could apply
- how much leave your organisation provides
- if leave is paid, and the amount of pay

This might be called 'compassionate', 'bereavement' or 'special' leave.

[View Acas's bereavement policy template](#)

If there's no policy

Employers should discuss with the employee:

- what type of leave for bereavement is available
- how much time off is available
- whether the leave will be paid or unpaid

The time off could be treated as sick leave, or if the employee requests, could be taken as holiday. Employers should be consistent and clear with the approach they take to supporting employees and confirm any decisions with their employees in writing.

[Find out more about the benefits of a bereavement policy](#)

Time off for a funeral

An employee has the right to time off for a funeral if the person who died was a dependant.

There's no legal right to time off for a funeral if the person who died was not a dependant. However your organisation might offer time off. This time off might be called 'compassionate leave' or 'special leave'.

In all circumstances there's no legal right for this time off to be paid, but some employers might offer pay. Employers and employees should check the employee's contract or organisation's policy.

If their organisation does not offer paid time off for a funeral, the employee and employer could agree on using:

- paid holiday entitlement (annual leave)
- unpaid leave

Employers should be compassionate towards a person's individual situation and should take into account that everyone experiences grief differently.

Employers should not discriminate against employees when deciding on time off. For example, not allowing an employee to attend a religious ceremony after a death could be religion or belief discrimination. Employers and employees should agree together how an employee takes time off for both religious and non-religious funerals.

[Find out more about discrimination](#)

If an employee or their partner has a stillbirth or miscarriage

If a child is stillborn after 24 weeks of pregnancy:

- the birth mother can get up to 52 weeks of statutory maternity leave or pay
- the birth father can get up to 2 weeks of paternity leave or pay
- the partner of the birth mother or adopter can get up to 2 weeks of paternity leave or pay

They are both entitled to 2 weeks of parental bereavement leave after they finish their maternity or paternity leave.

While the legal name for the time off is 'statutory maternity' and 'statutory paternity' leave, some employees might not want to call the time off 'maternity' or 'paternity' leave if their baby has died. Employers should be sensitive to the employee's preference and be led by them when having conversations about leave.

If a miscarriage happens in the first 24 weeks of pregnancy, there's no entitlement to statutory maternity, paternity or parental bereavement leave.

Read more about:

- [time off after a stillbirth or miscarriage](#)
- [parental bereavement leave and pay](#)

Pay during bereavement

There is no legal right to paid time off for bereavement, unless someone is eligible for parental bereavement pay when a child dies.

There are exceptions for agricultural employees – [contact the Acas helpline](#) to find out more.

Many employers choose to offer pay during bereavement. An employer might call this 'compassionate', 'bereavement' or 'special' paid leave. The amount an employer offers may depend on organisation policy or an employee's contract. If they're not sure, an employee should talk to their employer or manager and both should check the employee's contract if they have one.

The employer and employee could agree for time off to be taken as:

- sick leave
- paid holiday entitlement (annual leave)
- unpaid leave

If the employee takes the time off as sick leave or holiday, they should get their usual [sick pay](#) or [holiday pay](#).

2. If an employee's child dies

If an employee's child dies, employers should be compassionate and supportive.

If the child dies under the age of 18 or there's a pregnancy loss

Employees have a right to 2 weeks off if their child dies under the age of 18. They might also have the right to time off if they have a pregnancy loss. The time off is called 'parental bereavement leave' and is also known as 'Jack's Law'.

Employees and workers might also be eligible for 'parental bereavement pay'.

Anyone classed as an employee also has the right to unpaid time off if their child (a 'dependant') dies under the age of 18.

Read more about:

- [parental bereavement leave and pay](#)
- [time off for dependants](#)

If an employee is on adoption leave when their child dies

If an employee is on adoption leave and their newly adopted child dies, their leave will end 8 weeks after the end of the week in which the child dies.

In this situation an employer should support the employee and their partner with care, in a way that acknowledges the death.

If an employee is on shared parental leave when their child dies

If an employee is on shared parental leave when their child dies they can still take the leave in full. They can reduce the length of the leave or cancel it if they want to. To do this, their employer has to have at least 8 weeks' notice of the new end date, or 8 weeks' notice

to cancel the period of leave that has not yet started.

If an employee's child dies after they have given a 'notice of entitlement' to take shared parental leave, they can take the leave that they have already booked. If they have not yet given a notice of entitlement when their child dies, they cannot book a period of shared parental leave.

[Find out more about shared parental leave and pay](#)

If an employee is on neonatal care leave when their child dies

If an employee is on neonatal care leave when their child dies they can still take the leave in full. This is in addition to parental bereavement leave.

Neonatal care leave needs to be used within 68 weeks. Parental bereavement leave needs to be used within 56 weeks. Both types of leave cannot be taken at the same time as another type of statutory leave.

This means a mother, birth parent or primary adopter will need to take any maternity or adoption leave first. They could then take their parental bereavement leave and finally any accrued neonatal leave.

A father or partner who has already given notice for paternity leave will take paternity leave first. They could then take their parental bereavement leave within 56 weeks and any accrued neonatal leave within 68 weeks.

[Find out more about managing neonatal care leave](#)

If an employee's child is over 18

If an employee's child dies over the age of 18, the employee might have the right to paid or unpaid time off.

For example, they might be entitled to:

- [time off for dependants](#)
- time off under their contract – this might be written in the organisation's absence policy or bereavement policy, if they have one
- use their holiday entitlement for an amount of paid time off
- take sick leave – they might also be entitled to [sick pay](#)

3. Stillbirth or miscarriage

If a child is stillborn after 24 weeks of pregnancy:

- the birth mother can get up to 52 weeks of statutory maternity leave or pay
- the birth father can get up to 2 weeks of paternity leave or pay
- the partner of the birth mother or adopter can get up to 2 weeks of paternity leave or pay

They are both entitled to 2 weeks of parental bereavement leave after they finish their maternity or paternity leave.

While the legal name for the time off is 'statutory maternity' and 'statutory paternity' leave, some employees might not want to call the time off 'maternity' or 'paternity' leave if their baby has died. Employers should be sensitive to the employee's preference and be led by them when having conversations about leave.

Read more about:

- [parental bereavement leave and pay](#)
- [paternity leave and pay](#)
- [pregnancy at work](#)
- [statutory maternity leave and pay](#)

Time off after a miscarriage

If a miscarriage happens in the first 24 weeks of pregnancy, there's no entitlement to statutory maternity, paternity or parental bereavement leave.

However, many people would still consider miscarriage a bereavement. An employer should still consider offering time off at what can be an extremely difficult time, both physically and emotionally.

Some employers might offer a period of paid leave specifically for pregnancy loss.

Discussing a miscarriage can be very upsetting. Employers should treat anyone affected by miscarriage with care, in a way that acknowledges their loss. The employer should also support them in the same way they would [support someone after a death](#).

Protection for time off after a miscarriage

If a miscarriage happens in the first 24 weeks of pregnancy, any sickness absence the birth mother needs to take is likely to be considered a 'pregnancy-related illness'.

'Pregnancy and maternity' is a 'protected characteristic' under the Equality Act 2010. If an employee is put at a disadvantage and treated unfavourably because of a pregnancy-related illness or related time off this could be discrimination.

Any sickness absence that is pregnancy-related should be recorded separately from other sickness absence. You should not count these absences towards any [review or trigger points](#) in your absence policy.

Find out more about:

- [pregnancy and maternity discrimination](#)
- [fit notes and proof of sickness](#)

Supporting an employee after a miscarriage

Employers should consider what's best for their employee, depending on their specific circumstances and needs. They could support someone's return to work by:

- agreeing to make [reasonable adjustments](#) to their working patterns
- allowing a phased return or period of home working

Employers could also consider:

- creating a miscarriage policy that offers paid leave
- including miscarriage in any existing bereavement leave policies

4. Parental bereavement leave

Parental bereavement leave is time off following:

- the death of a child, if they die under the age of 18
- the death of a baby who only lives for a short time after birth – this can be at any stage of pregnancy
- a stillbirth after 24 weeks' pregnancy
- an abortion after 24 weeks – in very limited circumstances an abortion can take place after 24 weeks if the mother's life is at risk or the baby would be born with a severe disability

Parents will also have a right to [time off for dependants](#).

Eligible parents have a right to 2 weeks of:

- statutory parental bereavement leave, if they're an employee
- statutory parental bereavement pay, if they're an employee or worker

'Statutory' means the legal minimum an employer must give.

This right applies to the:

- birth parent
- natural parent (the person who gave birth to the child who has since been adopted, but has a court order to allow them to continue having access to the child)
- adoptive parent, if the child was living with them
- person who lived with the child and had responsibility for them, for at least 4 weeks before they died
- 'intended parent' – due to become the legal parent through surrogacy
- partner of the child's parent, if they live with the child and the child's parent in an enduring family relationship

Parental bereavement leave

Parents have a right to take statutory parental bereavement leave if they're [legally classed as an employee](#).

Employees have this right from the day they start their job.

Statutory parental bereavement leave can be taken in the 56 weeks following their child's death.

If more than one child dies, the employee is entitled to 2 weeks' statutory parental bereavement leave for each child.

Anyone [legally classed as a worker](#) is not entitled to statutory parental bereavement leave. But they might be entitled to 2 weeks' statutory parental bereavement pay for time they take off.

Using bereavement leave and maternity, paternity, adoption, neonatal or shared parental leave

As well as statutory parental bereavement leave, an employee might be able to take maternity, paternity, adoption, neonatal or shared parental leave for:

- the child who has died
- another child they've had

For the child who has died

If an employee's child dies, they can still take any statutory maternity, paternity, adoption, neonatal or shared parental leave they are entitled to for that child, as well as any parental bereavement leave.

For example, if an employee is a father and their child dies at 3 days old, they are likely to have already started their 2 weeks' paternity leave. They are entitled to finish their 2 weeks' paternity leave and then take 2 weeks' statutory parental bereavement leave.

For another child

If an employee is due to start a period of statutory maternity, paternity, adoption or shared parental leave for another child, their statutory parental bereavement leave will end when the new period of leave starts.

An employee can take any remaining statutory parental bereavement leave afterwards as long as they give notice, take the leave in one block and take it within 56 weeks.

If the remaining statutory parental bereavement leave is taken within 8 weeks of their child dying, an employee can start their leave as soon as they give notice. If an employee takes leave more than 8 weeks after their child dies, they must give their employer 1 week's notice.

Parental bereavement pay

[Employees and workers](#) are entitled to 2 weeks' statutory parental bereavement pay if:

- they are entitled to parental bereavement leave
- they were employed when their child died
- they'd worked for their employer for at least 26 weeks, on the Saturday before the child's death
- they earn on average at least £125 per week, before tax (£129 from 6 April 2026)

Employees must ask for statutory parental bereavement pay within 28 days of taking statutory parental bereavement leave, starting from the first day of the week they're claiming the payment for.

[Find out more about how to claim statutory parental bereavement pay on GOV.UK](#)

Some employees and workers will not be eligible for statutory parental bereavement pay. However it's a good idea to check your [organisation's bereavement policy](#), as the employer might still offer time off for bereavement.

How much statutory parental bereavement pay is

Statutory parental bereavement pay is the minimum amount employers must pay eligible staff.

Eligible employees and workers will get one of the following, whichever is lower:

- £187.18 a week (£194.32 from 6 April 2026)
- 90% of their average weekly earnings

Enhanced parental bereavement pay

Some employers offer enhanced ('contractual') bereavement pay that's more than statutory parental bereavement pay. It cannot be less.

The amount and how long someone gets it for should be clearly set out in either:

- their [written statement of employment particulars](#)
- the organisation's [bereavement policy](#)

Taking statutory parental bereavement leave

An employee can choose to take either 1 or 2 weeks' leave.

If an employee takes 2 weeks, this can be taken in one go, or as 2 separate weeks.

For example, they could take 1 week immediately after the death, and take the other week later on.

The leave must end within 56 weeks of the child's death. The date of the child's death is the first day of the 56 weeks.

Giving notice to take leave

An employee must tell their employer (give 'notice') to use statutory parental bereavement leave.

To give notice, the employee must tell their employer:

- when they want the leave to start
- whether they want to take 1 or 2 weeks' leave
- the date their child died

This notice does not have to be in writing.

The rules for giving notice depend on how long it's been since their child died.

Taking leave in the first 8 weeks

If it's within 8 weeks (56 days) of their child dying, an employee can start their leave as soon as they give notice.

They must tell their employer before they start their leave. This can be on the first day of leave as long it's before they're due to start work.

For example, if they've started work and give notice to start their leave straight away, statutory parental bereavement leave must start the following day.

They can also cancel the leave, as long as they tell their employer before their leave starts. This can be on the day their leave is due to start, as long it's before they're usually due to start work. Any cancelled leave can be taken later by giving notice again.

Taking leave after the first 8 weeks

If an employee takes leave more than 8 weeks (56 days) after their child dies, they must give their employer 1 week's notice:

- to take the leave
- if they want to cancel the leave

Any cancelled leave can be taken later by giving notice again.

Right to return to work

If an employee takes parental bereavement leave as a standalone period of leave (not combined with other statutory family leave), they have the right to return to the same job as before.

Combining parental bereavement leave with another period of family leave

If employees take parental bereavement leave immediately after another period of family leave, the right to return may be different. For example, if someone has taken maternity leave, adoption leave, ordinary parental leave or shared parental leave.

If you need more information on the right to return to work, [contact the Acas helpline](#).

Claiming statutory parental bereavement pay

Employees and workers must ask their employer in writing (give 'notice') to receive statutory parental bereavement pay. They must confirm:

- their name
- their entitlement to statutory parental bereavement pay
- the start and end dates of the leave they want to claim the pay for
- the date of their child's death
- their relationship with the child

Notice must be given within 28 days of starting leave. If someone takes the 2 weeks off separately, they must give notice in writing for each week.

Employees can give notice for their leave and pay in one document.

If an employee or their partner has a stillbirth or miscarriage

If a child is stillborn after 24 weeks of pregnancy:

- the birth mother can get up to 52 weeks of statutory maternity leave or pay
- the birth father or partner can get up to 2 weeks of paternity leave or pay

The birth mother, birth father or partner will be entitled to 2 weeks of parental bereavement leave after they finish their maternity or paternity leave.

While the legal name for the time off is 'statutory maternity' and 'statutory paternity' leave, some employees might not want to call the time off 'maternity' or 'paternity' leave if their baby has died. Employers should be sensitive to the employee's preference and be led by them when having conversations about leave.

If a miscarriage happens in the first 24 weeks of pregnancy, there's no entitlement to statutory maternity, paternity or parental bereavement leave.

However, many people would still consider miscarriage a bereavement. An employer should still consider offering time off at what can be an extremely difficult time, both physically and emotionally.

Supporting an employee after the death of a child

If an employee's child dies, it's important for employers to support their employee after the death, including when they return to work.

As an employer you should take into account that everyone experiences grief differently, and each employee's needs will be different. You should tailor your support to each person's individual needs.

[Find out more about supporting an employee after a death](#)

Example of supporting an employee

Drew's second child dies at 3 weeks old. Drew returns to work after parental bereavement leave. But they're often late and make mistakes.

Drew's manager Billie ignores this for several weeks, not wanting to put pressure on Drew. Eventually Billie decides to have an informal chat to find out how Drew is feeling.

Drew explains that the family is struggling to cope with the death. Drew's older child is refusing to get ready for school. This means Drew runs late and starts the day stressed.

Billie agrees that Drew will start and finish work an hour later. This means Drew can start work on time and in a better state of mind. Billie realises that having this conversation earlier would have been better.

5. What employees should do

If someone close to you dies, you might need to take time off work unexpectedly.

Depending on the circumstances, you might:

- need time off immediately
- decide to continue to work
- take time off later on

If you need time off

It's best to let your employer know as soon as you can if you need time off work.

You should try to follow your organisation's usual process for telling them. If you feel unable to contact them, you could ask someone else to do it for you. For example, a family member or close friend.

If you've had a miscarriage

You do not have to tell your employer you've had a miscarriage. But it's a good idea to tell them, if you feel able to, so they can offer you any support that's available, including time off.

What you should tell your employer

It's a good idea to let your employer know:

- how you'd like to be in contact while you're off, for example if phone or email is best, and how often you want to be in touch
- if you want others at work to know, and if they can contact you
- if you need any information or support from your manager or employer

It's up to you how much you tell them about the death, and whether you want others at work to know.

It might be difficult to know how long you'll need off work at first. Keeping in touch with your employer can help:

- update your employer
- plan your return to work when you're ready

[Find out more about keeping in touch during absence from work](#)

Example of keeping in touch

Alex works part time for a charity.

When Alex's mother dies, Alex emails their manager to let them know and to ask for time off. Alex's manager replies to say they're sorry to hear Alex's news. They reassure Alex that their work will be covered. Alex's manager also says to call or email if they need anything.

After taking 1 week off, Alex starts to worry about taking too much time off. Alex calls their manager.

The manager assures Alex they should take the time off they need. The manager confirms that their organisation provides 2 weeks' paid bereavement leave. The manager also says that if Alex needs more time off they could discuss using holiday, sick leave or look at other options. Alex's manager also passes on the details of counselling and other support available through work.

The conversations reassure Alex, and also help Alex's manager to understand what Alex needs.

Leave and pay

Check your contract or organisation's policy to see if your organisation offers leave or pay for bereavement.

Your organisation's bereavement policy, should say:

- how much leave your organisation provides
- if it's paid
- if it depends on your relationship to the person who died

If you're not sure what you're entitled to, check with your manager, employer or someone in HR.

If your employer does not offer leave for bereavement

By law, you might be entitled to time off if:

- the person who died is your 'dependant'
- your child was stillborn or died under the age of 18

If you're not well enough to work, you might get [sick pay](#) if you take sick leave.

You can talk to your employer about other options for taking time off, including [holiday](#) and unpaid leave.

[Find out more about time off and pay for bereavement](#)

Returning to work

It's a good idea to talk to your employer before you return to work to discuss:

- when you think you'll be ready to return
- anything you're concerned about when you return
- if the death has changed anything that might affect your work, for example if you now have more caring responsibilities outside of work and want to discuss flexible working options

[Find out about returning to work after absence](#)

Help and support

If you need support at work, it can help to:

- talk to your manager to see what support or adjustments might be possible
- use your organisation's employee assistance programme (EAP), if there's one available

You can also get help and support from the following organisations:

- [Bliss](#) for support and information for parents with a baby in neonatal care
- [Child Bereavement UK](#) if your child or baby dies
- [Cruse Bereavement Support](#) for advice on coping with a death
- [Hospice UK](#) for help talking about dying, death and bereavement
- [Mind](#) for mental health information and support
- [Miscarriage Association](#) for miscarriage support and advice
- [Sands](#) for support following the death of a baby before, during or shortly after birth
- [Sue Ryder](#) for advice on coping with a death

If you're unhappy about how your employer has handled your bereavement

If you're not happy with how your employer has handled things, you can raise this with them. It's usually best to raise the problem informally first.

[Find out more about how to raise a problem at work](#)

6. Supporting someone after a death

As an employer, you should take into account that everyone experiences grief differently. Each employee's needs will be different.

Some employees might need support soon after the death and also after they return to work. For example, on the anniversary of the death or if there's an inquest into the death. You should tailor your support to each individual person's needs.

Supporting an employee after a death can help:

- them feel valued
- reduce their stress or anxiety
- avoid or reduce sick leave
- keep a good working relationship
- keep the workplace productive

It's important to communicate with your employee to ask what support they need from you, and also to let them know what support you can offer.

For example, some employees will have a network of family and friends supporting them through the death. You should keep this in mind when considering the support you give them.

When an employee tells you about the death

When an employee tells you about the death, it's good practice to:

- offer your condolences
- assure them they do not need to come to work if they do not want to, and make it clear that work should come second
- ask how they'd like to keep in touch, for example by phone or email
- ask if there's any important work they need someone else to cover, if appropriate

If someone is upset they might not be able to talk for long, or someone else might contact you on their behalf. If this happens, it can help to follow up with an email, or call them a few days later.

Communicating in a calm, empathetic way can help employees feel supported, and help ease their anxiety about work.

Example of good communication

Cam's partner dies suddenly of a heart attack on the day Cam is due to chair a meeting at work.

Cam contacts their manager, Ashley, who quickly assures Cam they do not need to worry about work. Ashley checks if it is okay to tell other people at work about the death, and how Cam would like to keep in touch.

Over the next few days, Cam and Ashley speak again over the phone. Ashley reassures Cam that their workload will be handled by other members of staff. Ashley and the team send Cam a sympathy card. Cam and Ashley agree to speak again after the funeral.

When they next speak, Ashley confirms how much paid bereavement leave Cam can take, and that there are other options if they need more time off. Ashley also shares the details of counselling and other support available through work.

This helps reassure Cam, and helps Ashley check if Cam needs any support.

If they need time off

Check your organisation's bereavement policy to see how much leave your organisation can provide. Your bereavement policy should take into account that some staff may need to travel abroad at short notice and may need more time off.

If your organisation does not have a policy, it's good practice to talk to your employee and:

- check their [legal right to time off](#) during bereavement, for example parental bereavement leave
- consider their personal circumstances, including different religious and cultural practices
- look at what you've offered other bereaved employees, to make sure you're treating everyone fairly
- offer some paid time off for bereavement if possible (you might call this 'compassionate', 'bereavement' or 'special' leave)
- talk about using sick leave, holiday or unpaid leave to cover their time off, if you're unable to offer other paid leave for bereavement
- ask if they need other support

It's a good idea to have a bereavement policy if you do not have one.

[Find out more about the benefits of a bereavement policy](#)

Keeping in touch while an employee is off

In the first few days after a death it's important to communicate with the employee.

When you get in touch, it's good practice to ask:

- how they are
- how they'd like to be in contact while they're off, for example by phone or email, and how often

- if they want you to let others know about the death
- if they want to be contacted by others from work, for example to offer their support or condolences
- if they need any information or support from you, and signpost to any support that's available to them
- if they've thought about returning to work, if appropriate

Be careful not to pressure them into making any decisions before they're ready.

It can also help to train managers in how to have good, empathetic conversations with employees so they build confidence when dealing with a bereavement.

[Find out more about keeping in touch with an employee during absence](#)

Returning to work

It's usually not appropriate to talk about returning to work in the first days of bereavement.

Keeping in touch can allow you to have an open discussion about:

- how the employee is coping
- when they might be ready to return to work
- your organisation's policy on bereavement
- any adjustments that might help with their return, for example a phased return or a temporary change in duties
- what support would be most helpful to them, for example access to an employee assistance programme (EAP) or workplace counselling if available
- any changes at work they might want to know about, for example a bereaved parent might want to know in advance if someone else at work has become pregnant while they've been off

How quickly someone returns to work will be different for everyone. Someone might be unsure or not be able to judge how they'll feel when they return.

Keeping in touch and talking about adjustments can help plan their return. For example, discussing whether the employee would prefer a phased return. They might feel anxious about seeing people on their first day back. To help with this, you could talk with them about how the first day will be managed.

It's important to make sure everyone at work respects the employee's wishes on whether they want to discuss what has happened or not.

If they want, when they return to work it could help to have a catch-up with them to offer support and to check in on how they're doing.

[Find out more about returning to work after absence](#)

Example of supporting an employee's return to work

Nat's twin brother died 6 months ago. Nat took several weeks off work. Their manager, Stef, agreed a phased return to help Nat get back to work. Everything seemed to be going well.

Stef then notices that Nat seems withdrawn and unhappy. A customer complains about Nat. In an informal meeting, Stef asks if Nat is okay.

Nat explains the twins had planned a birthday celebration for the following week. This has made Nat's grief worse but Nat still wants to be at work.

Stef and Nat discuss how to help Nat get through this difficult time. They agree that Nat will temporarily swap to admin duties, rather than working with customers. This helps and Nat feels confident to talk to Stef about any problems in the future.

Ongoing support

Once an employee returns to work, you should continue to tailor your support to meet their needs. It's important for employers to recognise that grief affects everyone differently. There is no right or wrong way to grieve and it is not a linear process – it can affect people at different times following a death.

An employee might need extra support or time off following a death. For example, because of:

- grief symptoms affecting their performance, for example not being able to sleep, think or concentrate
- depression or other mental health problems
- extra responsibilities, for example helping a dependant

How your organisation deals with requests for extra support or time off depends on its bereavement or absence policies.

Even if you do not have a policy, you must follow the law by:

- not discriminating, for example if the employee's mental health problem is classed as a disability
- making [reasonable adjustments](#) to support a disabled employee

You should talk to the employee and discuss what's best for your employee's physical and mental health in the long term.

Doing things proactively can help prevent problems. For example:

- encouraging an open and supportive working environment for everyone
- signposting staff to your organisation's employee assistance programme (EAP), if there's one available
- sharing other support that's available outside your organisation, for example [Cruse Bereavement Support](#)

It's also likely the employee will be more productive if they feel they're getting the right support.

Mental health

Grief is a natural response people have to death and is not a mental health problem. However if someone's grief becomes complex, or they are unable to grieve, this may cause them to experience mental health problems. This can include anxiety and depression.

If someone has mental health problems after a bereavement, it's a good idea to talk to them to find out what support they might need at work.

[Find out more about supporting mental health at work](#)

Mental health and disability

Some people with mental health problems might be classed as having a disability under the law. You should make sure you:

- [do not discriminate against someone with a disability](#)
- make [reasonable adjustments](#) for a disabled employee

In most situations, it's best to look at how someone's condition or impairment affects them, rather than what the condition or impairment is.

[Find out more about supporting disabled people at work](#)

More advice and support

You can get more advice and support from:

- [Bliss](#) for support and information for parents with a baby in neonatal care
- [Cruse Bereavement Support](#) on handling bereavement, including training for employers
- [Hospice UK](#) on talking about dying, death and bereavement
- [Mind](#) on supporting someone's mental health
- [Miscarriage Association](#) for miscarriage support and advice
- [Sands](#) for support following the death of a baby before, during or shortly after birth
- [Sue Ryder](#) on supporting staff after a death

7. If someone at work dies

If someone at work dies, it can affect other employees and the workplace.

The employer should:

- tell others at work the person has died, in a sensitive and personal way
- offer support to staff affected by the death
- contact the person's family or next of kin to offer condolences
- let staff know how they can give their condolences
- share details of the funeral or ceremony, if staff have been invited

Before sharing any details with staff, it's best to ask the person's family or next of kin what they'd like people at work to know about the death.

Offering support

Grief can affect people in different ways and at different times after a death.

It's a good idea to:

- talk to staff regularly to see how they're coping
- signpost staff to any support that's available to them

[Find out more on supporting staff during bereavement](#)

It might be appropriate to honour the person who died. For example, you might consider:

- organising a book of condolence for staff to share their memories of the person who died
- holding an event or service to honour the person who died, inviting the family or next of kin as well, if appropriate

Example of supporting employees

Ali, a team leader at a company, dies. One of Ali's close friends at work calls the managing director, Farah, to let them know.

Farah speaks to Ali's family to express sympathy. Farah asks the family what they'd like people at Ali's work to be told. Farah speaks personally to Ali's team, then sends a message to all staff. Farah offers support to anyone affected by the death.

Farah checks the funeral arrangements with Ali's family. As a mark of respect, the company closes for 2 hours on the morning of the funeral. This is so everyone can attend or spend the time remembering Ali in their own way.

Staff welcome the way the company reacts to Ali's death. It improves confidence in Farah as a supportive leader.

Finalising an employee's affairs

The employer of the person who died should put their family or next of kin in touch with someone who can help finalise things in a sensitive and supportive way.

For example, someone who works in HR or a senior manager who can answer any questions about:

- the employment contract
- pay
- their pension
- other benefits
- how to return any personal belongings

8. Benefits of a bereavement policy

It's a good idea for your workplace to have a policy that covers time off and pay for bereavement.

A policy helps make clear:

- how much time off and pay staff are entitled to
- how managers can respond and support staff after a death

Even if there is a policy, employers should make some allowances. For example, a policy might say that an employee should tell their manager about a bereavement straight away. But a recently bereaved person might not feel emotionally able to do this. They might be off work for a few days before telling their manager about the death.

[Use our example bereavement policy](#)

What a bereavement policy should include

A bereavement policy should cover:

- how soon the bereavement should be reported
- who can report it, for example, a member of the employee's family if the employee is not able to do it themselves
- who it should be reported to, for example, the employee's manager
- what happens if the person who died is not a child or dependant
- how much leave is provided
- how much pay is provided
- how the leave is classed by the employer, for example 'compassionate' or 'bereavement' leave
- what happens if an employee needs more time off than stated in the policy
- how the employee's [return to work](#) is managed, for example whether they can return on reduced hours if they're not ready to return full time

If there's no policy

If there's no bereavement policy, the employer must follow the law. They should also try to be as fair as they can.

For example, they can look at how bereavement has been managed previously to help decide how it should be managed now or in the future.

It's good practice to [support your employee as much as you can](#).