

**WORKPLACE  
TOOLKIT**

# **Bereavement**

## How to manage it well



**Better Health**  
at Work Award



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# Foreword

Bereavement is a very personal experience and we all respond differently following the death of someone close to us. There is no right or wrong way to grieve. It is, understandably, a very sensitive topic and because of its nature it can be perceived as a difficult issue to address.

For a long time there has been a gap in the provision of information, guidance and support for workers and workplaces around bereavement, but the support employers can offer - practical as well as emotional - can make a significant difference to anyone experiencing bereavement.

This gap, and the need to fill it, has never been more apparent than in the recent past. So, after requests from our proactive Health Advocates and Trade Union Health & Safety Reps in the region, the Better Health at Work Award forged a partnership with Cruse Bereavement Care to deliver a practical and interactive best practice Toolkit for everyone in the workplace, whether they are experiencing or supporting bereavement.

The Better Health at Work Award is a partnership public health programme, supported by participating local authorities in the North East and Cumbria and coordinated by the Northern TUC.

This resource was produced by Cruse Bereavement Care in collaboration with Better Health at Work Award and has been funded by Public Health England (North East and Yorkshire Region)



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Cruse Bereavement Care is the leading national charity for bereaved people. They offer support, advice and information to children, young people and adults when someone die, and work to enhance society's care of bereaved people.

Cruse offers face-to-face, group, telephone, email and website support. They have a Freephone national helpline and local services throughout England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Their website Hope Again provides support for young people. All services are provided by trained volunteers and are confidential and free.

Cruse provides training and consultancy for external organisations and for those who may encounter bereaved people in the course of their work.



**Free National Helpline 0808 808 1677**

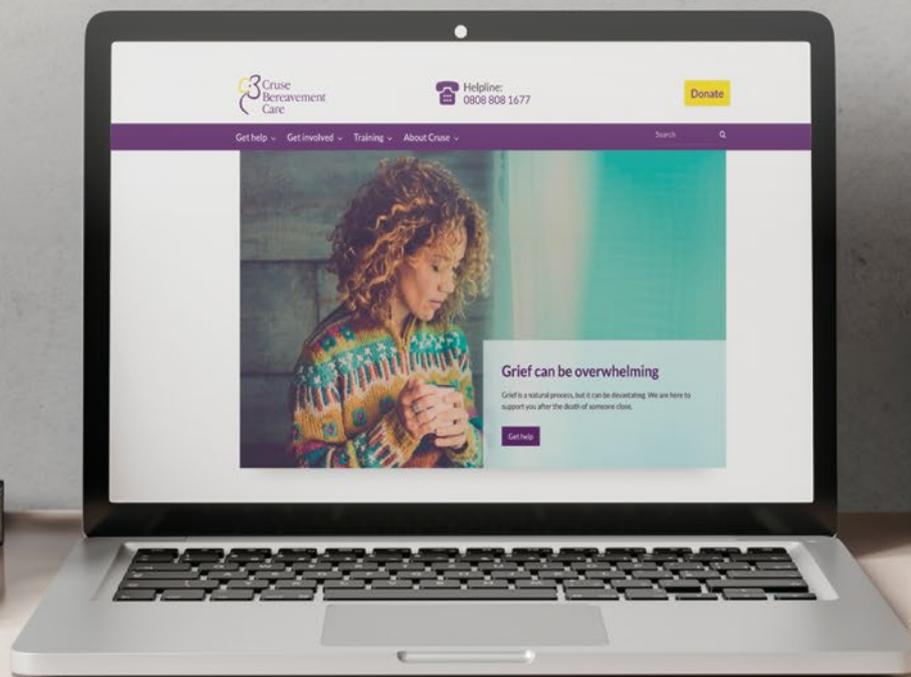
[www.cruse.org.uk](http://www.cruse.org.uk)

[www.betterhealthatworkaward.org.uk](http://www.betterhealthatworkaward.org.uk)

# Why support bereaved employees?

At any time, one in ten people in the UK is likely to be affected by a bereavement. We know that while many bereaved employees cope reasonably well at work, others struggle to manage their loss, and this can impact on their work and their relationships with managers and colleagues. A well planned and managed approach to bereavement at work not only helps bereaved employees to cope better with their loss but also:-

- Supports their return to productivity
- Can help reduce absenteeism and sick leave
- Helps avoid unnecessary staff turnover
- Addresses the impact on colleagues and co-workers
- Strengthens corporate culture and team morale



# Good practice when managing bereavement in the workplace

# Good practice when managing bereavement in the workplace

Grief impacts on almost every aspect of the bereaved person's life. It can interfere with their thought processes, concentration and sleep patterns at a time when they may need to make important decisions. Fatigue, anxiety and mood swings are common. Knowing that they are supported by their employer can help to minimise the employee's stress levels and reduce or avoid periods of sick leave.

Employers can prepare for managing bereavement in the workplace by having a clear bereavement policy and by training managers, HR teams and selected staff to have compassionate and effective conversations with bereaved employees. It is good practice to involve trade unions or staff representatives in developing a bereavement policy.

## Bereavement – dealing with the notification, and the immediate aftermath, of death

Whilst there is some key information managers will need to ask a bereaved person, it is important to recognise that they may be feeling numb or distressed during this initial conversation, and may not be able to take in or provide much information. A follow-up call or email may be appropriate.

A calm, empathetic approach in all communications from managers will ensure employees feel supported, and minimise their anxiety about returning to work.

In the early days of an employee's bereavement it is good practice for a manager to:

- Offer their condolences. See [What to say to a bereaved person](#).
- Ensure the bereaved employee knows they are not expected to work on the day the death has taken place. They need to hear that work comes second and that they must take what time out is needed.
- Begin a dialogue with the employee, asking how they would like to stay in contact. Is phone or email contact preferred? Are there particular times to avoid? Be aware that in the first few days, they may not wish to speak to anyone as they may be in shock. Be careful not to pressurise the employee into making decisions at this point.
- Ask how much information they wish their co-workers to have about the death and remember that this information is private under data protection legislation and to stick strictly to the facts.
- Ask if the employee wishes to be contacted by colleagues.

Depending on the circumstances there might also be a need to:

- Be conscious of diversity within the workforce and the impact this may have on, for example, days taken to allow the employee to fulfil religious or cultural expectations such as mourning rituals.
- Consider what action needs to be taken if the death is in the media; particularly if the press contact the workplace or approach co-workers for interview.

## EXAMPLE

**Maya's partner died unexpectedly of a heart attack early in the morning. She was expected to be chairing a meeting that same day. She was able to contact her line manager who assured her that she didn't need to worry about work and asked her what she would like her co-workers to know regarding her partner's death.**

**Over the next few days, her line manager spoke with Maya over the phone and reassured her that her workload would be dealt with by other members of staff. The manager sent a condolence card on behalf of the organisation and agreed to speak with Maya after the funeral to discuss how she was doing and anything the organisation could do to offer support and make the return to work easier. Maya felt that she had been listened to and her bereavement recognised.**

A conversation about when the employee anticipates returning to work may not be appropriate in the first days of bereavement. However, it is important to start a dialogue which will allow an open discussion around how the employee is coping, the employer's policy on bereavement, when they might be ready to return to work, and any adjustments that might help with this (e.g. a phased return).

## REMEMBER

Every bereavement is different: some employees may feel able to return to work very quickly, whilst others may need more time. The relationship with the person who died, and the circumstances of the death will all have an impact on the employee, particularly if the death was sudden or traumatic. It is often difficult for bereaved employees to judge how they will feel in the workplace, and employees who return to work quickly may still need support from their employers.

## Managing bereavement and returning to work

There are likely to be ups and downs, as the bereaved person adjusts to life without the person they lost. The full emotional impact of the bereavement may not be felt for some time after a death.

Regular contact will allow the manager and the bereaved employee to talk about and plan any strategies or adjustments which may be needed to help them to return to work and to support them upon their return.

Changes to consider might include a temporary or long-term change in hours or responsibilities or a phased return to work. If the business has an Employee Assistance Programme, a referral might be appropriate or signposting to an external organisation for bereavement counselling. It should be clear to who the employee should speak if they need additional support from their employer.

## EXTRA CONSIDERATION

Particular care should be taken where the work itself involves dealing with death or bereavement e.g. employees working in care settings or the funeral industry. The bereaved employee may find that their capacity for working resiliently may be reduced by a personal experience of loss.

## Ongoing considerations

Special or significant days, such as the inquest, anniversary of the death, or the birthday of the person who died, can also be particularly difficult times for bereaved people. Sensitivity around these times, particularly when considering requests for specific days off, will help employees to manage their grief.

Over a year, a bereaved employee may breach company sickness limits. Employers should consider whether it is appropriate to exclude some or all of the time off associated with the bereavement. It is also good practice to take the bereavement into account if there is an impact on any aspect of the employee's work or performance.

## EXAMPLE

Mala is 24 and works for a clothing retailer. Her twin brother died eight months ago. Initially Mala felt she was coping well and she returned to work full-time shortly after the funeral. Mala is now finding things increasingly difficult and her manager Ava notices that she is making more mistakes on the tills and is snapping at customers.

Ava asks Mala for an informal chat to discuss how she's coping. Mala explains that her birthday is the following week and this will be the first one without her brother. She asks if she can have the day off, but all leave needs to be booked well in advance, and as it is a Saturday, the busiest day in the shop, Ava explains that she will not be able to spare her.

Later, Ava looks at the rota again, and is able to change the shifts so that Mala has the day off. They also agree that Mala will swap to stockroom duties for the next ten days, as she feels she will be okay to be in work, but might find dealing with customers hard. At this stage, Ava gently asks if there are any other dates coming up which Mala might find difficult to be at work, and they book in annual leave for the anniversary of the death.

Bereavement will frequently lead to changes in the personal and financial circumstances of the bereaved employee. An employee who loses their partner, for example, becomes responsible for raising their children as a single parent. An employee may have to take on caring responsibilities for an elderly parent. Any death which affects children or vulnerable adults will mean they need increased support from the people who care for them. If your business offers support such as emergency child care schemes, carers fora, etc it might be helpful to make sure that the employee is aware and knows how to access them.

Employers need to be mindful of the family unit of the bereaved employee, and appreciate that in many cases, a flexible approach, for example, offering part-time hours, or flexible working, is most likely to support and retain the employee, and minimise sick days, as they negotiate new or increased caring responsibilities.

## EXAMPLE

Colin had been with the company for 12 years working in an important and demanding role. He approached his manager to explain that his wife's health was deteriorating and he needed to spend more time with his wife and care for their two children. He asked if it would be possible to work a few days per month on a contract basis as this would allow him to work part-time from home without giving up work altogether, as the family relied on his income.

His manager showed great empathy for Colin's situation and arranged for him to work from home and reduce his hours. This enabled the family to spend time together until his wife's death.

Afterwards Colin continued on this basis, providing a sense of stability for the children as the family grieved and until the family felt ready for him to return to full-time hours. It was agreed that he would start half an hour later in the mornings so he could continue to take the children to school.

Both the company and Colin gained from this arrangement as Colin was able to continue working.

## When a child dies

For parents, the loss of a child will be devastating and employers will need to recognise that the whole family will be affected.

For example, is the employee a single parent? Was the child an only child or are there siblings involved?

The answers to these questions may influence how much support from the workplace is needed.

A single parent with other children to attend to will possibly need more flexibility (e.g. time off, flexible working etc.) in order to return to full-time work. Some bereaved parents may need a longer term change in their working hours.

A couple grieving over the death of a child may also need flexibility regarding their work hours especially if one parent is not coping as well as the other.

They may need to leave the workplace at short notice to support their partner.

## When a colleague dies

In some situations, a death can have an impact on a number of employees or across the whole workforce. Examples are where a co-worker has died, where the death occurred at or near the place of work, and where a number of the dead person's family or friends are employed at the same place of work.

How an organisation deals with events such as this will usually define their culture and the attachment that employees generally have to the organisation.

The principles of flexibility and empathy still very much apply, but there may be an increased impact on the organisation and the way it is dealt with can have long-lasting implications (positive or negative) on the relations between the employer, the workforce and the wider community.

Communicating the news of the death to other employees is key and the method of communication should be personal and sensitive. There may be areas of the organisation, for example the team where the person who died worked, that are particularly affected and they may need more support.

The employer should contact the family to offer condolences, and agree a point of contact for any questions they may have – for example, about pay, or pension arrangements.

Practical points like books of condolence and attendance at the funeral should be considered by managers and clearly communicated to the wider workforce. There may be appropriate ways of commemorating the person who has died and of marking key dates; the family should be consulted about these.

## EXAMPLE

Marie, a team leader at a cleaning company, was killed in a road crash driving home from work. The managing director, Jay, received a call from one of Marie's close friends, a co-worker during that evening in a very distressed state.

Although Jay was shaken himself, he spoke to members of Marie's team as soon as they arrived at work and then called all the staff together to tell them personally, what had happened, express his condolences to Marie's friends and colleagues, and explain how the company would be supporting Marie's family and affected employees. He allowed members of Marie's team to go home early if they wished – most stayed at work because they found it helpful to be together even though they were not able to focus well on work.

Jay set up a small group of employees to help the organisation through the next few weeks. Key customers who might be affected were contacted and proved very supportive. Other teams in the business stepped in to take on some of the work of Marie's team. Jay spoke to Marie's family to express his condolences and to ensure that the company observed their wishes for the funeral. As a mark of respect the company closed for two hours on the morning of the funeral so that everyone who wanted to could attend.

Jay started to notice that his relationship with many employees had changed. They were happier to approach him directly with thoughts and ideas and despite the shock of Marie's death, their motivation seemed very good and productivity was up. There were still difficult days but overall the business had gained from the way it had reacted to a terrible situation.

# Avoiding discrimination and addressing bullying

# Avoiding discrimination and addressing bullying

Employers should consider any request for time off in connection with bereavement from an employee in a reasonable and objective manner.

## Discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief

The Equality Act 2010 protects employees from discrimination because of their religion or belief and recent decisions of the Courts mean that employers should try and accommodate religious beliefs and customs where it would be reasonable and practicable to do so. Many religions have bereavement requirements and employers should carefully consider these against the business reasons for not observing the belief or custom

### EXAMPLE

Joe tells his employer that his father has died and he requires the following day off to attend the funeral. As an observant Jew, he is expected to stay at home and mourn for seven days, as a requirement of his faith. The employer allows time off for the funeral but refuses Joe's request for seven days mourning because he considers the notice inadequate and would be unable to rearrange Joe's work duties.

Unless the employer can objectively justify this decision, it may amount to indirect religious discrimination under the Equality Act 2010.

## Discrimination because of disability

For some employees, the effects of loss and grief can amount to a disability (e.g. depression) where the condition is long-term (generally defined as lasting or likely to last over a year) and the impact affects the employee's ability to undertake day-to-day activities. An employee with a disability has the right to reasonable adjustments and their employer will need to take reasonable actions to reduce or remove the effect of the impairment on the employee at work.

### EXAMPLE

Mo, a manager, is interviewing one of her team, Richard, because of his attendance and sickness record. Mo notes from the personal file that Richard's attendance began to deteriorate after the death of his son a year ago. Although the company had given him five days' compassionate leave and as much support as was available at that time, he was regularly signed off because of stress and one doctor had diagnosed Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Mo realises that Richard may have a disability under the Equality Act 2010 as PTSD is clearly affecting his normal day-to-day activities. She stops the meeting and seeks further

information from the company's occupational health provider. She also speaks to other managers in the company who confirm her view and suggest she should be considering reasonable adjustments for Richard rather than an investigatory meeting into his high absence levels.

Mo discusses what could be a suitable adjustment with Richard and agrees to a higher sickness threshold and a modified job role which no longer involves driving (Richard has found that he feels worse when he is out of the office and away from colleagues as he has time to dwell on his son's death).

Mo reviews Richard's attendance and wellbeing some months later and whilst he still has bad days, his attendance and reliability have improved and continue to do so.

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## Bullying

Absence through bereavement can place burdens on co-workers and line managers who may pressurise (inadvertently or otherwise) or bully a bereaved employee into returning to work or performing their duties to the same level as they did before the death.

The intentions of the bully do not matter – what is important is the impact that the behaviour has on the employee who is being bullied.

## EXAMPLE

Rubi works on a telephone helpline and recently lost her mother. On her return from bereavement leave she is finding it hard to cope at work: she is struggling to reach her targets for calls answered and sometimes leaves the room visibly upset.

Brandon, the manager, notices that the staff are unhappy at what they see as "carrying Rubi", an attitude reinforced by the vocal views of her supervisor who has been overheard saying "she should get a grip, when my mother died, I found work a relief. Look at the problems she is causing us."

Rubi has noticed the shaking heads of colleagues and their "tuts" when she leaves the room and this is adding to her distress.

Although Brandon recognises the burden on the team, the company has a zero tolerance policy when it comes to bullying and harassment. Brandon tells the supervisor to stop this behaviour and makes sure that staff know that they could face disciplinary action if this behaviour continues. He also sees if a temporary worker can be deployed until Rubi is able to reach her performance targets.

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# Frequently asked questions

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## **My employee has told me that their relative has been diagnosed with a life-limiting illness. What should I do?**

As with bereavement, everyone will respond differently to a diagnosis of a life-limiting illness (sometimes called a 'terminal' illness). The impact on the employee, and on their practical and financial concerns, can be similar to bereavement, and should not be underestimated. In addition to employees' right to 'reasonable' time off to deal with emergency situations, it is good practice for employers to open a dialogue and taking a compassionate, flexible approach. It is important to meet regularly with the employee to check how they are coping, and facilitate time off when needed through flexible working, annual leave, special/compassionate leave or a career break. Your organisation may have a flexible working policy which will give further guidance on this.

Employees who take leave to care for someone who is dying are still likely to need support after the death.

## **Should employees be given paid bereavement leave?**

It is good practice to offer employees some paid leave after a bereavement. Leave entitlement should be clearly set out in your organisation's bereavement policy. Some employers may choose to offer different amounts of leave depending on who has died (more days for a child than for a grandparent, for example) whilst others may prefer to have a set number of days for any significant bereavement. Managers should be flexible when applying the policy.

The physical and emotional impact of grief may mean that some bereaved employees become unwell and are unable to be at work for a period after a bereavement. As a result, they may take time off sick. Some bereaved employees may need additional time away from work to cope with their grief, make practical arrangements, or to support a bereaved child. In cases where the employee feels they need time away from work but where sick leave is not appropriate, it would be good practice to offer an alternative, for example flexible or part-time working, or a period of special leave or a career break. This can be paid or unpaid.

## **In the year after their bereavement, my employee has taken more than the normal or trigger number of sick days. Should I start disciplinary action?**

It is good practice to take bereavement into consideration when looking at absence rates. If you notice continued absence, then a discussion between you and the employee would be helpful as bereavement affects physical as well as emotional health. If after a period of time you are unable to allow further absence, then you should let the employee know and the effect this could have on their employment.

## **Could it be considered discrimination if I don't allow a bereaved employee time off to attend a funeral? What if the funeral is abroad?**

Funeral requirements vary across cultures, and some communities may require that these are carried out promptly. Refusing to allow an employee to attend religious rites after a death could be considered indirect religious discrimination. It is good practice to accommodate requests to attend funeral rites wherever possible.

Where a funeral is abroad it would be good practice to accommodate time off for travel where the employer can accommodate this absence. This can be as paid or unpaid leave. Sometimes an employee may wish to supplement bereavement/compassionate leave with further unpaid or annual leave, where you allow this, you should let the employee choose between either unpaid or annual leave.

### **One of my employees has been bereaved. What should I say to the rest of the team?**

Bereavement is a personal issue and employees have the right to keep this confidential under data protection legislation. Good practice would be to speak with the bereaved person and ask them what they would like their colleagues to be told. If you can't contact them, then say as little as possible to the team. It may be appropriate to explain their absence by referring to 'personal reasons' or at most 'bereavement'. The employee can decide how much they want their colleagues to know at a later point.

If a bereaved employee is worried about how they will be treated by colleagues on their return to work, ask them what would help, and offer to share this with the wider team. For example, some employees may ask that no one mentions the bereavement, but instead keeps things focused on work matters. Others will appreciate gestures of empathy and support.

### **If I give my employee time off for their bereavement, does it mean I'll have to give all my employees the same allowance?**

It is good practice to have a bereavement policy that clearly outlines what all employees are entitled to. However, every bereavement is different, and there may be exceptional circumstances in different cases. Each bereavement should be considered on a case-by-case basis.

### **We are a small organisation with no dedicated HR team or employee assistance programme. Where can I get advice or training about what to say, or arrange support for my employee?**

Cruse Bereavement Care is the leading national charity for bereaved people.

Cruse offers face-to-face, group, telephone, email and website support. They have a Freephone national helpline and local services throughout England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Services are provided by trained volunteers and are confidential and free.

For more information go to [www.cruse.org.uk](http://www.cruse.org.uk). Cruse can also offer tailored training for businesses and organisations.

For advice on employment rights and rules, best practice or about a dispute, the [Acas Helpline](http://www.acas.org.uk) can be contacted on **0300 123 1100**.

Chartered Institute of Personnel & Development website has additional guidance [www.cipd.org.uk](http://www.cipd.org.uk)

Business in the Community have a toolkit that can be downloaded [www.bitc.org.uk/toolkit/covid-19-the-impact-on-death-bereavement-and-grief/](http://www.bitc.org.uk/toolkit/covid-19-the-impact-on-death-bereavement-and-grief/)

## **FINANCIAL SUPPORT**

There are other forms of support workers can access. The government provides some financial support to those on low incomes. The funeral expenses payment is a grant towards the cost of a simple funeral for people on certain benefits. The maximum sum rose to £1,000 in 2020. There is also a Bereavement Support Payment for people who have lost a spouse or civil partner.

Some unions have benevolent funds that can support the cost of funerals or other needs, which members may wish to apply to.

# Resources

# Links and contacts

Adult bereavement and befriending	
WAY Widowed and Young	<a href="http://www.widowedandyoung.org.uk">www.widowedandyoung.org.uk</a>
Gingerbread: Single parents, equal families	<a href="http://www.gingerbread.org.uk">www.gingerbread.org.uk</a>
The Jolly Dollies: Social network for widows	<a href="http://www.thejollydollies.co.uk">www.thejollydollies.co.uk</a>
WAY Up: For those widowed in their 50's and 60's	<a href="http://www.way-up.co.uk">www.way-up.co.uk</a>
The Silver Line: helpline for older people	<a href="http://www.thesilverline.org.uk">www.thesilverline.org.uk</a>
Age UK: Bereavement Information Guide	<a href="http://www.ageuk.org.uk">www.ageuk.org.uk</a>
Loss of a child	
The Compassionate Friends	<a href="http://www.tcf.org.uk">www.tcf.org.uk</a>
The Lullaby Trust	<a href="http://www.lullabytrust.org.uk">www.lullabytrust.org.uk</a>
Child Death Helpline	<a href="http://www.childdeathhelpline.org.uk">www.childdeathhelpline.org.uk</a>
Child Funeral Charity: Financial Support for Families	<a href="http://www.childfuneralcharity.org.uk">www.childfuneralcharity.org.uk</a>
Child Bereavement UK	<a href="http://www.childbereavementuk.org">www.childbereavementuk.org</a>
For children and young people	
Hope Again	<a href="http://www.hopeagain.org.uk">www.hopeagain.org.uk</a>
Winston's Wish	<a href="http://www.winstonswish.org">www.winstonswish.org</a>
Childline	<a href="http://www.childline.org.uk">www.childline.org.uk</a>
Childhood Bereavement Network	<a href="http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk">www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk</a>
Child Bereavement UK	<a href="http://www.childbereavementuk.org">www.childbereavementuk.org</a>
Grief Encounter	<a href="http://www.griefencounter.org.uk">www.griefencounter.org.uk</a>
Papyrus: prevention of young suicide	<a href="http://www.papyrus-uk.org">www.papyrus-uk.org</a>
Loss in pregnancy	
The Miscarriage Association	<a href="http://www.miscarriageassociation.org.uk">www.miscarriageassociation.org.uk</a>
Sands: The stillbirth and neonatal death charity	<a href="http://www.sands.org.uk">www.sands.org.uk</a>
Special Educational Needs / Learning Difficulties	
National Autistic Society advice pages	<a href="http://www.autism.org.uk">www.autism.org.uk</a>
Mencap bereavement advice pages	<a href="http://www.mencap.org.uk">www.mencap.org.uk</a>
Child Bereavement UK factsheets	<a href="http://www.childbereavementuk.org">www.childbereavementuk.org</a>

<b>Counselling</b>	
British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP)	<a href="http://www.bacp.co.uk">www.bacp.co.uk</a>
Royal College of Psychiatrists	<a href="http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk">www.rcpsych.ac.uk</a>
National Counselling Society	<a href="http://www.nationalcounsellingsociety.org">www.nationalcounsellingsociety.org</a>
Counselling Directory	<a href="http://www.counselling-directory.org.uk">www.counselling-directory.org.uk</a>
Samaritans	<a href="http://www.samaritans.org">www.samaritans.org</a>
<b>Practical matters</b>	
Step by Step guide	<a href="http://www.gov.uk/when-someone-dies">www.gov.uk/when-someone-dies</a>
Money Advice Centre	<a href="http://www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk">www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk</a>
Bereavement Advice Centre	<a href="http://www.bereavementadvice.org">www.bereavementadvice.org</a>
<b>Pre-bereavement</b>	
Dying matters	<a href="http://www.dyingmatters.org">www.dyingmatters.org</a>
Hospice UK	<a href="http://www.hospiceuk.org">www.hospiceuk.org</a>
The Good Grief Trust	<a href="http://www.thegoodgrieftrust.org">www.thegoodgrieftrust.org</a>
Marie Curie: Care and support through terminal illness	<a href="http://www.mariecurie.org.uk">www.mariecurie.org.uk</a>
<b>Traumatic bereavement</b>	
Victim Support	<a href="http://www.victimsupport.org.uk">www.victimsupport.org.uk</a>
Support after Murder and Manslaughter	<a href="http://www.samm.org.uk">www.samm.org.uk</a>
Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide	<a href="http://www.uksobs.org">www.uksobs.org</a>
Inquest: advice to bereaved people on contentious deaths	<a href="http://www.inquest.org.uk">www.inquest.org.uk</a>
AfterTrauma: helping survivors of traumatic injury	<a href="http://www.aftertrauma.org">www.aftertrauma.org</a>
<b>Specific illnesses and causes of death</b>	
RoadPeace: the national charity for road crash victims	<a href="http://www.roadpeace.org">www.roadpeace.org</a>
Adfam: supporting families affected by drugs or alcohol	<a href="http://www.adfam.org.uk">www.adfam.org.uk</a>
Sudden: supporting people after sudden death	<a href="http://www.suddendeath.org">www.suddendeath.org</a>
<b>Pet loss</b>	
Blue Cross	<a href="http://www.bluecross.org.uk">www.bluecross.org.uk</a>

Please note that this isn't a comprehensive list of organisations offering advice and support following bereavement. We are not responsible for the activities of any external organisation.

# Template bereavement policy

We recognise that dealing with a bereavement is often one of the biggest challenges of an employee's life. This policy sets out our commitment to supporting staff through their grief by providing bereavement leave, keeping in touch with staff while they are off work, and supporting staff on their return to work.

We acknowledge that every bereavement is different and grief impacts everyone in different ways. This policy is intended to cater for a wide range of circumstances and the differing impacts that a bereavement can have, while also recognising the needs of the organisation.

This policy takes account of the introduction of the government policy on parental bereavement leave, which is available to the parents of a child who died on or after 6 April 2020.

## Bereavement leave

Bereavement leave is paid leave that gives the employee time off to deal with their personal distress and any related practical arrangements.

[Organisation Name] acknowledges that bereavement impacts all individuals differently and the guidelines below are intended to show the paid leave an employee is entitled to in different circumstances. [Organisation Name] acknowledges that not all employees will need or want to take the full allowance, and some employees will need additional time, depending on their relationship with the person who has died and the circumstances of the death.

### Immediate family member (other than child under 18 where the employee is also eligible for parental bereavement leave)

In the event of the death of an immediate family member (other than a child where the employee is eligible for parental bereavement leave – see below) you are able to take up to two calendar weeks' paid bereavement leave.

For the purposes of this policy, an "immediate family member" is defined as a:

- spouse or civil partner;
- partner (including same-sex partner);
- parent (including step-parent);
- adult child (i.e. who is aged 18 or over, meaning that the employee is not eligible for parental bereavement leave);
- sibling (including step-sibling);

### Individual who is not an immediate family member

We also recognise that you may be grieving following the death an individual who is not classed as an immediate family member, but with whom you nevertheless had a very close relationship, for example a grandchild, grandparent, aunt, an uncle, a cousin or a close friend.

If this is the case, please speak to your manager or HR Manager to discuss taking bereavement leave and to establish how [Organisation Name] can best support you with what leave you need at this time. You can be granted up to two

calendar weeks' paid bereavement leave but we understand that in a few cases this may not be enough and we will work with you to support you as best we can. Each situation is different and will be impacted by:

- the closeness of your relationship with the deceased;
- your obligations towards the deceased (for example if you are responsible for arranging the deceased's funeral);
- travel required (for example if you need to travel a significant distance to be with relatives); and
- any bereavement requirements in relation to religion, such as an extended period of mourning (with the onus on you to tell your line manager about these requirements).

## Parental Bereavement Leave

Whilst dealing with any bereavement is difficult, the death of a child is among the most devastating events that an employee can ever face. [Organisation Name] acknowledges how difficult this situation would be for any parent and provide an additional two weeks parental bereavement leave in addition to the statutory parental bereavement leave outlined below:

### Statutory Parental Bereavement Leave

The policy, as directed by the government, applies to employees whose child dies under the age of 18 on or after 6 April 2020. This includes parents who suffer a stillbirth after 24 weeks of pregnancy.

### Who can take parental bereavement leave?

Whatever your length of service, you can take this type of leave if you are the parent of the child who has died, or the partner of the child's parent. In general, you can take this type of leave if you have parental responsibility for the child. This includes adoptive parents.

If you have suffered a bereavement, but are unsure if you are entitled to parental bereavement leave, please contact the HR department for clarification.

### What leave can a bereaved parent take?

Under this government policy you are entitled to take two weeks of parental bereavement leave. Please note the following is from the government's policy which would be the absolute minimum [Organisation Name] would offer to support you under such tragic circumstances.

You can take the leave as:

- a single block of two weeks; or
- two separate blocks of one week at different times.

You cannot take the leave as individual days.

You can take the leave at the time(s) you choose within the 56 weeks after your bereavement. You might choose, for example, to take it at a particularly difficult time such as your child's birthday.

If you have lost more than one child, you have a separate entitlement to bereavement leave for each child who has died.

## Notice to take parental bereavement leave

If you need to take parental bereavement leave within the first 56 days after your bereavement, you can take the leave straight away. You do not have to provide any notice but please do let your line manager or HR manager know you will be taking it. Ideally if you can give notice, please do. But we understand these are very distressing times and its not always possible.

To take leave more than 56 days after your bereavement, ideally please give your line manager and the HR department at least one week's notice, though we understand that grief can come out of the blue.

## Changing your mind about taking parental bereavement leave

You can cancel your planned leave and take it at a different time (within the 56 weeks after your bereavement). Where your planned leave was due to begin during the first 56 days after your bereavement, please let your line manager and the HR department know you no longer wish to take it before your normal start time on the first day of the planned leave.

Where your leave was due to begin more than 56 days after your bereavement, please let your line manager and the HR department know at least one week in advance that you wish to cancel it.

## Pay during parental bereavement leave

We recognise the need to provide bereaved parents with as much support as possible, and we will continue to pay normal pay during your leave.

## Rights during parental bereavement leave

During your leave, all the terms and conditions of your contract will continue. This means that all benefits will remain in place. For example, holiday entitlement continues to accrue. Pension contributions will continue to be paid.

## Returning to work after parental bereavement leave

When you return to work after some time on parental bereavement leave, you generally have the right to return to the same job.

However, a slightly different rule applies if you return from time on bereavement leave that follows on immediately from some maternity, adoption, paternity leave or shared parental leave (taken in relation to the child who has died), and your total time on leave is more than 26 weeks. In these circumstances, you have the right to return to the same job, unless this is not reasonably practical – in which case you have the right to return to a suitable and appropriate job on the same terms and conditions.

This rule also applies if your leave includes more than four weeks of ordinary parental leave (taken in relation to any child), regardless of the total length of the leave. If you are taking parental bereavement leave, but are unsure where you stand on your return, please contact the HR department for clarification. For more information on statutory parental bereavement leave and pay, please visit the [Gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk) page

## Annual leave

An employee who suffers a family bereavement while on annual leave can convert their annual leave into bereavement leave and take their annual leave at a future date.

## Unpaid leave

We understand how hard a bereavement can be and that an extended period of leave may be needed. We will talk to you about how we can support you through this from considering paid leave to unpaid. We will do what we can to support you at this time, whilst also still needing to run the charity to support all those who have been bereaved.

## Return to work

In certain circumstances a full return to work may not be possible for an employee following the death of an immediate relative – for example, when the employee's 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 [Organisation Name] will support a phased return to work on a part-time or reduced hours' basis where practicable. Alternative duties may also be considered. Any such arrangement would be agreed in advance by the line manager, would be subject to an agreed maximum number of days and would be managed in line with [Organisation Name] flexible working/part-time working policy.

Bereavement can have an impact on concentration, sleep, and decision-making. The health and safety assessment of the workplace will include consideration of the impact of

bereavement on employees, their duties and responsibilities, and the context in which they are working.

Any employee who is concerned about their ability to conduct their duties safely in the weeks following a bereavement must discuss this with their line manager.

## Employee support

[Organisation Name] acknowledges that bereavement leave is intended to support employees in the immediate period around the death of a relative. However, the grieving, the natural reaction and adjustment to loss and change may take a significant time and will be personal to each individual. It is fundamental to [Organisation Name] that we support bereaved people so we really want to support you. Please do talk to your line manager and your colleague.

An employee with any concerns about the grief impacting on their work performance should discuss this in confidence with either their line manager or the Human Resources Department, to ensure that:

- any reasonable adjustments that may be necessary are discussed and put in place
- the employee is supported in their return to the full range of duties and responsibilities that they had prior to the bereavement
- or their duties and responsibilities are adjusted (as necessary) with the prior agreement of line manager.

[Organisation Name] recognises that the majority of people do not require counselling to cope effectively with their grief. However, [insert details of any Employee Assistance programme] is available for employees. Alternatively, support can be accessed from charities Such as Cruse Bereavement Care, faith groups and understanding friends and family.

# Advice if you have been bereaved – is this normal?

People respond to bereavement in a number of different ways, but there is no ‘normal’ way to grieve. The many different aspects of grief can come as a shock – bereaved people often say that they feel like they’re going mad, and one of the biggest questions people have is ‘Is this normal?’

## I’ve heard their voice and keep thinking I see them

It is quite normal to see a person who has died, to hear their voice, sense their presence, or find yourself talking to them. It can often happen you least expect it, as if the mind has temporarily ‘forgotten’ that they have died, or because the brain is trying to process the death and acknowledge the finality of it.

## I’m so angry with everyone

Anger is a completely normal part of grief. You may find yourself facing family, financial and domestic responsibilities which you don’t feel able to cope with. You may feel angry with someone you feel is responsible in some way for the death. You may feel angry with the person who has died for leaving you. These are all normal responses to feeling out of control, powerless and abandoned.

## I feel anxious all the time

People often feel very anxious after someone dies. Sometimes this can result in feeling panicky, breathless or having palpitations. A full panic attack can be a very frightening experience. It can make you feel dizzy or confused, faint or even be sick. There are some simple things you can do which some people find help, such as trying breathing exercises. But if the feelings don’t improve or you are struggling to cope you should contact your GP.

## I keep going over and over every detail of the last few days before they died

This is a common reaction, particularly where the death was sudden and unexpected, or occurred in traumatic circumstances. It is the mind’s way of dealing with what has happened. However sometimes after a traumatic experience people become very disturbed by mental images, which in a severe form can become Post-Traumatic-Stress Disorder (PTSD). You should consult your GP or seek specialist advice if you think this might apply to you.

## I don’t feel anything

Feeling numb is common in the early days after a bereavement. The shock can have this effect, and some people at first carry on as if nothing has happened. It is hard to believe that someone important is not coming back.

Many people feel disorientated – as if they have lost their place and purpose in life or are living in a different world. Usually this passes but if you are having trouble feeling anything after some time, or if the lack of feeling is troubling you, reach out for support – from your employer, GP or Cruse Bereavement Care.

### **I can't stop crying/I haven't cried at all**

People react to grief in very different ways. Some people find they cry very frequently and may be overwhelmed by the strength of their emotions. Others may feel numb for some time, or feel unable to cry. Some people experience swings between extremes. All reactions are common. People's responses are affected by many things, including personality, upbringing and culture, and it doesn't necessarily reflect how you felt about the person who died.

If you are finding your emotions difficult to deal with or are worried that you are not able to feel things after some time has passed, it might be time to access support from your employer, GP or Cruse Bereavement Care.

### **I should be over it but I feel worse than ever**

Sometimes it is just when you think you should be feeling better that you feel as if you are falling apart. In the early days following a bereavement, family and friends often rally round and it is only later, when everyone has gone home and you are left with your grief, that the reality of the death hits you.

The physical and emotional loneliness can be very hard to bear. There is no time limit on grief. If you feel that you are struggling with your emotions or that you are not coping with life, then it may be time to seek help and support.

### **I feel like I'm physically ill**

Grief can affect your whole system. There are other aches and pains which people often report after they have been bereaved. It can also affect your sleep and digestion and reduce your ability to fight off minor infections. These are normal reactions to distress and loss, and should pass in time. But you may want to consult your GP if the problems persist or you need some help managing them.

### **I can't sleep/I'm sleeping too much**

Sleep disruption is very common after someone dies. You may find sleep is impossible, and your mind is constantly racing. Sometimes people are frightened to go to sleep – bad dreams and nightmares are common. Sometimes people tell us that they also dread those dreams where the person is still alive, and find the moment of waking and remembering each day very painful. Some people also find they need to sleep more than before and struggle to stay awake in the day. If sleep problems go on for more than a week or so consult your GP.

### **I can't eat/I'm eating too much**

It's common to lose your appetite and find it difficult to eat after someone dies, especially in the early days. It may feel impossible to swallow and food may taste strange. Some people experience the opposite and find they are eating more than usual, or without thinking. Digestive upsets are also common, and it can feel similar to being constantly stressed and anxious. It's very normal but consult your GP if symptoms don't ease, or if you find you lose or gain a lot of weight.

# Helping a bereaved person

If you are supporting someone following a bereavement – family, friends, work colleagues – these are some suggestions that may help you, and them. People who have been bereaved may want to talk about the person who has died. One of the most helpful things you can do is simply listen, and give them time and space to grieve. Offering specific practical help – not vague general offers – can also be very helpful. Do...

## Be there for the person who is grieving

Pick up the phone, write a letter/email, call by or arrange to visit. Don't avoid, ignore or 'cross the road'

## Accept that everyone grieves in their own way – there is no 'normal' way

Accept and acknowledge all feelings. Let the grieving person know that it's okay to cry in front of you, to get angry, or to break down. Don't try to tell them how they should or shouldn't feel. The bereaved should feel free to express their feelings, without fear of judgement, argument or criticism.

## Offer comfort and reassurance without minimizing the loss

Tell the bereaved that what they're feeling is okay. If you've gone through a similar loss, share your own experience if you think it would help. However, don't give unsolicited advice, claim to "know" what the person is feeling, or compare your grief to theirs.

## Accept that you can't make it better

Your instinct may be to try and make things better for the bereaved family; instead, give your condolences, and then be quiet.

Don't use clichés: 'I understand how you feel'; 'You'll get over it'; 'Time heals.'

If you get halfway through saying the wrong thing, just stop. No one will ask you to finish.

Some things are OK for the bereaved person to say, but they are not OK for you to say when supporting them; such as 'He's in a better place now'.

## Encourage the person to talk if they want to

Let the bereaved talk about their loved one, including how they died. People who are grieving may need to tell the story over and over again, sometimes in minute detail. Be patient. Repeating the story is a way of processing and accepting the death. With each retelling, the pain lessens.

# What to say to a bereaved person

People who have been bereaved may want – or need – to talk about the person who has died. One of the most helpful things you can do is simply to listen, and give them the time to express their grief. Offering specific help, according to the particular circumstances, may also be very useful in helping recognise they are not alone with their particular issue.

- Offer your condolences: “I’m sorry ...”
- Be fully present for the person who is grieving by listening intently.
- Slow the pace of your speech down a little if necessary.
- If the bereaved person begins to cry, give your permission for them to do this in a gentle manner: “It’s okay, I’m comfortable with tears.”
- Encourage the person to begin speaking by using open questions, if allowing them to speak freely about their bereavement would help. Use phrases such as:
  - “What do you need from me?” “What can I do to help you?” “Is there something else?” (i.e. just one thing rather than a general statement).
  - “What makes this situation difficult for you?”
  - “What would make it easier?”
  - “I am here to help you with ... (particular task), and we will get through it together.”
- Be aware that grief can take a long time to process. Some people have a need to repeat parts of their story to help make sense of it.
- Leave comfortable pauses and silences to slow the conversation down and allow the grieving person some ‘thinking’ time.
- Provide a brief summary of any discussion and any actions you are taking as a result of the conversation. Offer an avenue for them to come back to you at a later date:
- Listen out for cues to respond. Convey empathy rather than sympathy. Ensure they can ‘sense’ your empathy through facial expressions, sensitive manner, tone of voice, etc.
- Remember that ‘wants’ and ‘needs’ may be continually changing during the grieving process. Offer practical help (within boundaries permitted, according to the situation).
- If you feel the bereaved person would benefit from having information about support which is beyond your remit, pass on appropriate details about Cruse Bereavement Care and other charities.

# Top tips for managers

Planning ahead will help employers support employees in the event of a bereavement. This means having an organisational bereavement policy and ensuring key staff are properly trained.

## DO:

- ✓ Be caring and compassionate.
- ✓ Offer your condolences.
- ✓ Ensure the bereaved employee knows they need not come to work on the day of the death, and that work comes second.
- ✓ Ask how they would like to stay in contact.
- ✓ Ask how much information they want co-workers to know, and if they wish to be contacted by colleagues.
- ✓ Consider any family or children who are affected.
- ✓ Be conscious of diversity, and accommodate religious beliefs and customs where it is reasonable and practical.
- ✓ Stay in regular contact.
- ✓ Consider what action to take if the death is in the media.
- ✓ Discuss with the employee when it is appropriate to return to work, in accordance with your organisation's bereavement policy.
- ✓ Consider adjustments that may be needed, such as a phased return to work or temporary change of duties.
- ✓ On return, hold regular reviews with the bereaved employee.
- ✓ Give the employee appropriate leaflets and information about Cruse.

- ✓ Take bereavement into account should there be an impact on performance.
- ✓ Be aware of changes in personal circumstances, such as caring responsibilities.
- ✓ Deal sensitively with requests for further time off in line with your bereavement policy.
- ✓ Consider the impact on other members of the team, and watch out for bullying or harassment.
- ✓ Be aware that special dates such as inquests, birthdays and the anniversary of a death may have an impact on your employee.
- ✓ Remember that the full impact of a bereavement may not be felt until sometime after the death.

## DON'T:

- ✗ Ignore the situation.
- ✗ Assume you know how the bereaved employee is feeling – every bereavement is unique.
- ✗ Say anything that may minimise or undermine the loss, such as 'we all have to go sometime' or 'she had a good innings'.
- ✗ Say anything to make light of bereavement, such as 'time will heal'; 'pull yourself together'; 'it must be a great relief for you'.
- ✗ Make the assumption that just because they are back at work they are 'over it' and 'back to normal'.

# Video resources



The lasting impact of grief



Communicating Grief



What does grief feel like?



Who are Cruse?

## Bereavement Stories



Widow



Loss of a baby



These clips can be viewed on the Cruse Bereavement Care YouTube Channel. Scan the QR code for further details.