

Bereavement guide for employers and employees

Grief affects everyone in a unique way — physically, emotionally and psychologically.

It's really important that someone who has suffered a bereavement feels able to talk to their employer, and that employers feel they have the right resources to support them. So this guide is split into two sections — one for the employee and one for the employer — giving both parties the tools they need to navigate this difficult time.



Employer resources

Bereavement can be a difficult subject to broach with an employee. It's natural to be worried about saying or doing the wrong thing and causing a colleague further distress. People often underestimate grief — its impact, its intensity, its duration, its unpredictability and the unique effect it has on the bereaved. We need to remember how important it is to support each individual with compassion. Don't assume you understand the impact the individual loss will have, or how your employee will be affected.

Employer resources

Feeling prepared – where possible

You may know in advance that an employee will lose someone close to them, which will give you the opportunity to prepare yourself to help them when the bereavement happens.

Managing a bereavement

Remember to acknowledge the employee's loss and what they are going through, ensure you're available if they need you, and listen to what they are saying. Be clear and open with your employee about what leave they're entitled to, and how their pay might be affected when they take time away from work. Let them know what you expect from them and what they can expect from you. If you have a bereavement policy, make sure you know what it says so you can share the information with your employee. It's also helpful to understand what support might be available to your employee via third parties, such as bereavement counselling.

Bereavement policies

A policy should cover the following key areas: entitlement to leave (immediate and longer term); returning to work; supporting grieving colleagues; health and safety; culture; diversity; and any third party support which is available. If you don't already have a policy in place, [ACAS](#) can help you create one.

Line manager skills

Line managers need to be flexible (whilst working in line with the company's policies) and empathetic, while being respectful of professional boundaries. These support tools can help guide you.

- > [Employer dos and don'ts](#)
- > [What should I do when someone I know has been bereaved?](#)
- > [When bereavement enters the workplace](#)

Returning to work

Keep in touch with your employee while they are away from work on compassionate leave. When they are ready to return, you will be key to helping them do so successfully. Be prepared to make allowances if their performance is affected and remember that milestones such as anniversaries or birthdays may also be difficult times.

- > [Supporting a bereaved colleague](#)
- > [Helping someone return to work after their baby or child has died](#)



Unum has created a comprehensive bereavement workshop in partnership with St Catherine's Hospice, which includes valuable tools and resources. Go to [Bereavement module](#).



Employee resources

Going through a bereavement can feel incredibly isolating. So we'd like to share some valuable resources to help support you and your loved ones. These resources look at how to cope immediately after your bereavement, as well as dealing with your feelings as time passes and you return to work. It's incredibly important to communicate with your family and friends — as well as talking to your employer to find out what support is available to you.

We hope you find these support tools helpful.

> [How we grieve](#)

Grieving is something that most of us will have to face in our life, but there is no set path and everyone grieves differently.

> [Why is my partner grieving differently](#)

Following a death within the family, we may expect grief to be similar because of the shared experience – but grief is individual and a partner may grieve in a very different way.

> [Tell us once](#)

Reporting a death to most government departments in one place.

> [Support after suicide](#)

Support and information following a suicide.

> [Managing grief](#)

Tools and ideas that you might want to use to help support yourself.