

Bereavement guide for employers and employees

Losing someone close to us can be extremely difficult. The grief that may follow a bereavement can affect people in a number of ways – physically, emotionally and psychologically – and in a manner unique to them. And it's not always possible to leave it at the door to the workplace – potentially impacting both work and the working environment.

It can be a difficult time for both the employee and employer, so together, Unum and Child Bereavement UK have produced this bereavement guide to help navigate bereavement and the grieving process.

We'll cover **the 3 Cs: Communication, Compassion, Connection** and sensitively, but constructively, link you to important areas and support services, such as our online bereavement workshop.



Employer guide

People often underestimate grief – its impact, its intensity, its duration, its unpredictability and its uniqueness to the bereaved. We will all react differently to a bereavement, which means, as an employer, it is vital to recognise that grief is unique – as are the circumstances of each person's loss. Don't assume what impact the individual loss will have, or how your employee will be affected.

Bereavement can also be a difficult subject to broach at a highly emotional time. As an employer, we don't tend to prepare for it and are naturally often worried about saying or doing the wrong thing and causing further upset. As a result, we may hold back.

You may know in advance that an employee will lose someone close to them. There are a number of ways where you can help your employee. Make sure you're fully prepared, so when the bereavement actually happens, you are ready to provide the appropriate support.

[Further information >](#)

Employer guide

Managing a bereavement

Make sure you're clear and open about what you expect from the employee, what leave they're entitled to, and how their pay may be affected. You should also explore what support you may already have from your Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) or other third party providers.

Be familiar with your workplace policies. Having a bereavement policy in place can mitigate the costs of employee grief for all concerned, and the likely impact on the productivity of both the bereaved person and the business as a whole. It also helps strike the right balance between a supportive environment and the expectations of the employee and their role.

Creating a bereavement policy

Remember **the 3 Cs** and build this into your approach

A policy should ideally cover a number of areas. You may want to consider including entitlement to leave (immediate and longer term), returning to work, supporting grieving colleagues, health and safety, culture and diversity, and available support, such as an EAP.

If you do not have a policy in place, [ACAS can help you](#). Legislation is an ideal starting point, but you should also think about your organisation's culture, resources, the unique and individual nature of how each person will go through bereavement and try to apply the 3 Cs. Be aware of other legal requirements, like [parental bereavement leave and pay](#) for employees whose children have died.

Line manager skills

Remember **the 3 Cs** and how best to deliver them

Line managers need to be flexible (in line with the policy) and empathetic, while keeping professional boundaries.

Remember to acknowledge the employee's loss and what they are going through, ensure you're available if needed, and listen to what the employee is saying. These support tools can help guide you.

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

Returning to work

Employers are key to easing a bereaved employee's return to work. Keep in touch with them during their absence, so you are fully prepared for when they come back. Make allowances if performance is affected, and remember that family milestones such as anniversaries or birthdays may also be difficult times.

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

Support

- > Child Bereavement UK [website](#) and Helpline **0800 02 888 40**
- > [Unum's online bereavement workshop](#)
- > Employer and Employee Assistance Programme: Businesses may offer an EAP, which typically includes telephone advice and support, access to counselling and online resources for managers and staff.



Employee guide

A bereavement can be a difficult time for you and those around you. Your reaction to a bereavement and your situation depends on – and can be affected by – a variety of factors: the particular circumstances surrounding the death, the nature of your relationship with the deceased, the environment in which the bereavement is being managed, the support available, and by your personality, background and coping style.

You may be unsure how to best communicate what you're going through or what you need from your employer. Or you may be unaware of the support services available or how to access them. Speak to your employer about what support there is for you.

They may have an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP), which typically includes telephone advice and support, access to counselling and online resources.

Check or ask for your employer's bereavement policy (if they have one). Knowing where you stand with leave, pay and the support available is reassuring, and helps you work with your line manager to ensure you can manage financially, practically and emotionally.

[Further information >](#)



Employee guide

These support tools can help

- › **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.
- › **Looking after yourself when someone has died**
Though it may not be a priority, particularly when overwhelmed by your grief or caring for others, these simple tips can help you look after yourself.
- › **Children's understanding of death at different ages**
What children understand about death, and how they react, depends on their age and stage of development.
- › **Managing special occasions**
When someone has died, family and other special occasions can be painful and difficult to manage.
- › **At a loss**
A one-stop shop for finding specific and local bereavement support with online Grief Chat facility.
- › **Death of a baby or child at any age**
Local and national support organisations.
- › **Supporting children when a partner has died**
Local and national support organisations.
- › **Support after suicide**
Support and information following a suicide.
- › **Tell us once**
Reporting a death to most government departments in one place.
- › **Returning to work after the death of your baby or child**
Some suggestions for bereaved parents managing the daunting return to work.
- › **Child Bereavement UK website**
and Helpline **0800 02 888 40**
- › **Unum's online bereavement workshop**
- › **Employee Assistance Programme:**
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