

Coping with Bereavement at Work



Bereavement leave

When someone close to us dies, it can be difficult to know what to do next or who to turn to for help. The instinct for some is to hide away, while others want routine. There is no set way to grieve, and each bereavement is different.

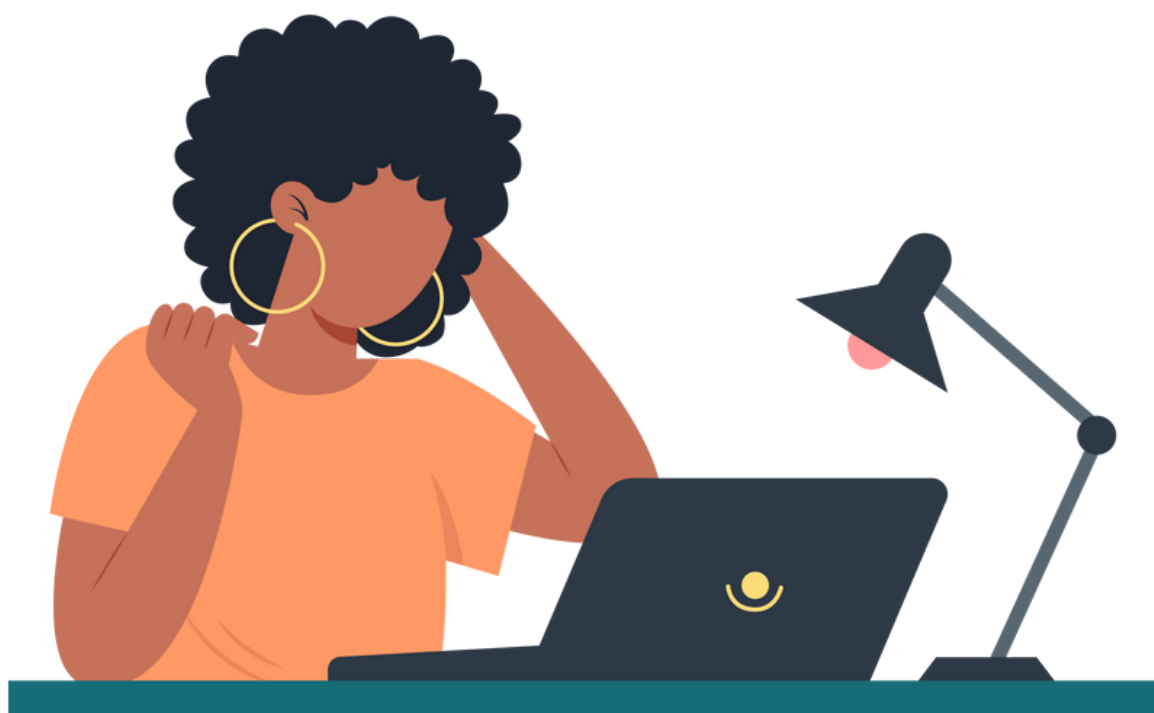
The workplace can provide valuable help and support for anyone going through a bereavement. This guide offers practical tips on how to access this and what you are entitled to as an employee.

Bereavement leave

Following a death of a loved one, it's usual to have time away from work. As well as dealing with the loss, there are often many practical arrangements to be made.

Telling your employer

It's really important that you let either your line manager or your HR team know about your bereavement as soon as possible. The earlier they know, the more they will be able to support you through this difficult time. If you don't feel ready to speak to them, send an email or text message. They may be uncertain how much contact you want and whether they can tell others, so let them know when you'll be ready to talk and if they can let the rest of the team or the business know about your loss.



Time off work

If the person who has died is a dependent, a close relative like a parent or a child, then you may be entitled to time off work. If the person was not a dependent or child, then as the law currently stands there is no legal right to leave.

Under the Employment Rights Act 1996, UK employers must give employees a 'reasonable' number of days off for a bereavement, but this leave is unpaid, and it is up to the employer to decide how long that 'reasonable' time should be. This can be anywhere from a few days to two weeks. This is often known as compassionate leave.

For the death of a dependent, an employee is also entitled to time off for the funeral. There is no legal obligation for this to be paid leave. If your employer has a bereavement policy, this will cover all details of the leave and pay that you're entitled to.

If the person who has died is your child and is under the age of 18 or was stillborn after 24 weeks, then under Jack's Law, you are entitled to two weeks paid leave. To be eligible, you must have been with your employer for more than six months. This can be taken together or in two separate weeks anytime in the 12 months following the death.



How much leave should you take?

This is completely down to you and your circumstances. If there is a lot to arrange, you may feel you need more time. If you find being at work helps, then you might want to come back more quickly. The important thing is to talk to your line manager and let them know what you're feeling and when you think you'll be ready.


Returning to work

The thought of going back to work can be scary. The prospect of dealing with meetings, deadlines and colleagues can be daunting. Having these fears is completely normal. If you are worried, speak to your line manager.

Setting up call before you return to work will help you discuss what options are available to you, such as reducing your hours for a short period or flexible working arrangements. It will also give your line manager time to prepare the rest of the team and make sure everyone is ready to support you as much as possible.

Dealing with grief at work

Your feelings of grief are likely to change over time and you may need different support at different times. Research suggests there are five stages of grief, known as the grief cycle. These are:

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- Denial
 - Anger
 - Depression
 - Bargaining
 - Acceptance

It is important to stress that this is not a linear process. There is no right or wrong way of moving between these stages and it may be that not every stage is experienced. What you may find is that these range of emotions will have an impact on your performance and how you interact with people at work.

Keep the dialogue going with your line manager and HR team so they are aware of how you are feeling and what support they can offer you. This might include:

- Adjusting your working hours;
- Revising your objectives;
- Providing additional resources;
- Accessing specialist services through your Employee Assistance Programme, Occupational Health or other services.

Thoughts from Nadia Hepburn, Therapist at Wellness Cloud & Parent Cloud

Bereavement is a topic that most people find difficult, even though each one of us will experience a loss at some point in our lives. Grief is such a personal experience, and it can feel like no one understands what you're going through. The reality is that no-one will ever really know what it is like to walk in your shoes but there may be some trusted colleagues at work who would like to support you in holding you in your grief.



You may find people at work, and outside of work, are reluctant to ask you how you are or may even avoid you and/or the subject completely. This can feel isolating and painful. Showing vulnerability, especially in the workplace, can be extremely hard but allowing one or two people to know where you are at can ease some of that isolation.

When you return to work after a bereavement, you may feel your capacity to focus and concentrate will be challenged and your tolerance levels tested. Often people find that they experience brain fog and struggle to retain information. This is normal. You are not going crazy. You're navigating unknown territory and it is important to work out your pace on what you can and can't cope with.



Grief is exhausting. If you can, ease yourself back into work. Hard as it may feel, if you are struggling, ask for help. This may feel like you're failing but you're not. This is recognising that you're in pain right now and need some support whilst you work through it. This is being self-compassionate.

Being physical may feel like the last thing you want to do but try and build some exercise into your day, whether that's on your commute, at lunchtime or after work. For some, it's a walk, a jog, for others it can be yoga, kick-boxing, there's no right or wrong. Work out what feels right for you. If needs be, step away from your desk. Take a moment to catch your breath outside. A change of scene, of rhythm, has its benefits and helps support you during this difficult time.

If you feel like you're not coping, don't suffer in silence. If your workplace offers counselling, take advantage of it. If there is nothing available, there are many different bereavement support services you can access virtually or in person.



Additional resources

We recommend the below links for further information and support with bereavement.

[Cruse Bereavement Care](#) – the UK's leading bereavement charity.

[At A Loss](#) – a signposting service to help you find the right help and support.

[Child Bereavement UK](#) – support for anyone who is affected by the death of a child.

[The Good Grief Trust](#) – helps anyone affected by grief.

[Samaritans](#) – call free for support 24/7, 365 days a year.



Wellness Cloud & Parent Cloud give you easy remote access to experienced counsellors who can support you with bereavement and loss.

For further information, or to book a session online with one of our specialists, visit our website.

www.the-wellness-cloud.com

www.parent-cloud.com



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