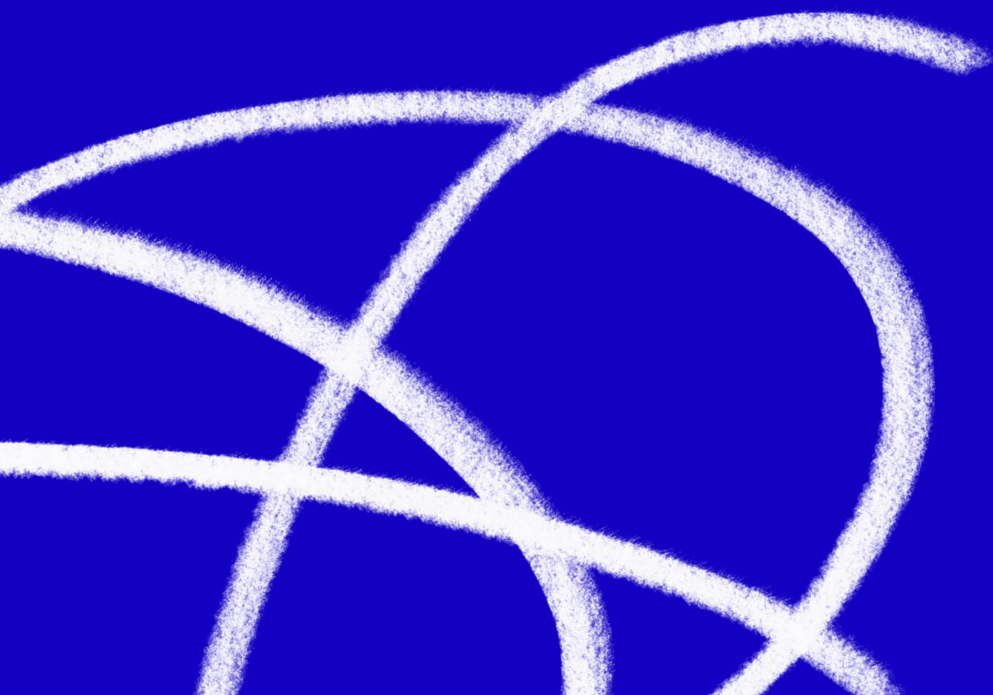




Bereavement



Supporting staff during a bereavement

Grief has been described as the other side of love. It is not an illness to be cured, but a natural response to loss. It is something we will all experience, but few of us are comfortable talking about. It is not time-limited or linear and does not follow neat “stages” which ends when someone is “over it.” We can carry the loss of a loved one with us throughout our lives, and it will affect us differently at different times.

The National Mind website gives more detail on what grief can feel like for people:

www.mind.org.uk/information-support/guides-to-support-and-services/bereavement/experiences-of-grief

Breaking the taboo – talking about grief

Very few of us are comfortable talking about grief and bereavement. We are afraid of saying the wrong thing, somehow making things worse. The subject might bring up painful memories of bereavements of our own, or our fear of losing loved ones in the future. A bereaved person might also feel they cannot talk openly to friends or colleagues for fear of upsetting them, or because they believe they will not understand.

Whether we are at work or at home, there are several things we can remember to help us talk about grief and support our bereaved friends, family and colleagues.

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- Don't worry too much about what to say – your support is more important than finding the perfect words.
 - Listening is more important than talking – let the bereaved person talk about how they are feeling without rushing them or offering advice.
 - Don't be afraid of “making someone cry” – tears are a natural part of grief and are not a sign you have done or said anything wrong.
 - As time passes, don't be afraid to bring the person up in conversation – it can be heartbreaking for a bereaved person if everyone avoids talking about their loved one.
 - Be aware that certain times of year like birthdays and the anniversary of the death can bring up strong emotions.

Do not:

- Offer unsolicited advice on how to deal with grief. Everyone grieves differently, and what might work for you might not work for someone else.
- Put a time limit on someone's grief. Whether the bereavement was a month, a year or a decade ago, everyone grieves in their own way. We do not “get over” grief, we learn to live with it, and everyone does that in their own way.

For specific examples of what to say and what not to say, see the Cruse website:

www.cruse.org.uk/understanding-grief/managing-grief/what-to-say-when-someone-dies

Creating a supportive workplace

Everyone will experience bereavement during their working lives. Cultivating an open, supportive attitude within your team where mental health and bereavement are not taboo subjects will help both the recently bereaved and people whose grief is more long-standing. Let your team know it's ok to talk about their loved ones and how they are feeling.

- Remember that grief is different for everyone – there is no right or wrong way to grieve. Respect and accept every individual's grieving process.
- Recognise that people may find certain times of the year such as anniversaries or birthdays difficult and be prepared to offer support.
- Follow the advice in the rest of this guide to create a workplace which is supportive of employees' mental health.

Supporting a team member after a bereavement

- Check your company's bereavement policy or the ACAS website for more information on an employee's rights and best practice around bereavement.
- Your bereavement policy may state that an employee is permitted a specific amount of time off depending on their relationship to the deceased. Real life is rarely so simple, and the death of a friend or more distant relative does not necessarily mean the bereavement will be easier. Exercise compassion and use your discretion whenever possible to take the employee's individual circumstances into account.
- Remember every individual is different and will have different needs, including different cultural needs.

When an employee tells you about a death

- Offer your condolences and try to communicate calmly and empathetically.
- Reassure the employee that their work should come second, and their workload will be managed.
- Ask them how they would like to keep in touch.
- If someone is unable to speak for long on the day their loved one dies or if someone contacts you on their behalf, follow up with a phone call or email in a few days.

While an employee is off work after a bereavement

- Stay in touch according to the employee's preferences, but ensure they understand you are checking in on their wellbeing and not contacting them to talk about work.
- Ask the employee how they are and give them time to share as much or as little as they want about how they are feeling.
- Ask if they would like to be contacted by others at work, including condolence messages.
- Ask if you would like them to inform colleagues why you are not at work, and what they would like you to say.
- Do not talk to the employee about returning to work in the first days of a bereavement. As time goes on, keeping in touch will allow you to have an open conversation about work without the employee feeling pressured to return before they are ready.
- Check whether there are any cultural or religious differences that need to be considered

www.illumapps.com/griefworks-blog/grief-and-cultural-differences-coping-across-diverse-perspectives/

Planning employee's returns to work

- Remember every individual is different – the employee may not know what support they will need when they return. Regular 1:1 meetings and willingness to make adjustments once the employee has returned will help to reduce stress and ease them back into the workplace.
- Discuss any adjustments or additional support the employee might need when they return, such as a temporary change of duties, phased return, availability of their manager for a 1:1 meeting to check in etc.
- If your company offers counselling or an Employee Assistance Programme, ensure the employee knows how to access this – give them time during their working day to contact EAP as it may be difficult for them to do this at home.
- Ask the employee what their wishes are around discussing the bereavement at work, and ensure their colleagues understand and abide by their wishes.

When the employee returns to work

- Remember grief is an ongoing process and can affect individuals long-term in different ways.
- Continue to offer support to the employee and check in with them.
- Remember the employee may need time off for practical reasons such as the admin required after a death.
- Support the employee to take further time off for the funeral if they return to work before it takes place.
- Follow the advice at the beginning of this guide around talking about grief and creating a supportive workplace. 5

Further resources:

www.cipd.org/uk/knowledge/guides/bereavement-support-line-managers

www.mentalhealth-uk.org/help-and-information/grief

www.acas.org.uk/time-off-for-bereavement

www.sueryder.org/grief-support/supporting-someone-bereaved/employer-bereavement-support

www.mind.org.uk/information-support/guides-to-support-and-services/bereavement

www.cruse.org.uk/understanding-grief

www.macmillan.org.uk/cancer-information-and-support/supporting-someone/coping-with-bereavement

Further information about supporting staff through specific forms of bereavement:

Cancer: www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/coping/dying-with-cancer/resources-and-support

Death of a child: www.tcf.org.uk/resources/LP01-Helpling-a-Bereaved-Employee-C04R1005.pdf

Miscarriage: www.miscarriageassociation.org.uk/miscarriage-and-the-workplace

Suicide: www.mind.org.uk/information-support/guides-to-support-and-services/bereavement/bereavement-by-suicide