



If you are bereaved parent

You can self-certify sickness absence for the first week, and then you will need to visit your GP for a 'fit note' to continue to take sick leave.

Has someone in your workplace been affected by the sudden and unexpected death of a baby or child? Chances are you are reading this to look for ways to support them. A strong support system can make such a difference when someone is grieving. Thank you for wanting to be that difference.

Employers

Legalities as an employer

Make sure your knowledge of legal entitlements, such as eligibility for statutory pay, leave and other sources of support, are up to date. Do this before speaking with your bereaved employee about their return to work, so that the information you give them is clear and concise.

In England, Scotland, and Wales (from April 2020) employed parents are entitled to two weeks bereavement leave in the year following the death of their child (24 weeks gestation - under 18 years old). This can be taken as 2 weeks together or 2 separate weeks of leave.

For More information see:

Working Families | Parental Bereavement Leave (Jack's law) - Working Families
<https://www.gov.uk/parental-bereavement-pay-leave>

Consider giving any information verbally and in written form, so that they can revisit it in their own time. It can be hard to retain information after a traumatic event such as the death of a child.

Consider having easily editable request forms for Parental Bereavement Leave:





Dear *name of employer*,

I am writing to let you know that my child died on *DATE*.

I am notifying you that that I am taking Parental Bereavement Leave and Pay.

I am taking one/two weeks of leave and pay, starting on *DATE* and ending on *DATE*.

I confirm that I meet the eligibility criteria of a bereaved parent, as the child's *mother/father*.

Sincerely,
Name _____

Best Practice:

Be aware that grief is not linear. There is no 'getting over' the death of a child. Your employee is likely to have good days and bad. With ongoing understanding support, they are more likely to manage fluctuations in emotion more successfully. The following advice is about supporting your Employee after the death of their baby or small child before they return to work and when they have returned from Parental Bereavement or Maternity leave.

Before Coming Back to Work



- Offer your **condolences** of the death of their baby/child, using the child's name.
- **Let them know that you are thinking of them** and will keep in touch to see how they are doing.
- **Ask them how they would like to be contacted:** phone, email, home visit, etc. Agree how often this will take place.
- **Offer to inform colleagues, if this feels helpful.** Some individuals worry about what colleagues may or may not know on their return to work. Agree on what information and messages the family



would like to be passed on, this can help reduce the same questions being asked by colleagues.

- **Ask them what support they would like from other colleagues** and pass this message on so that everybody knows what to expect. Some people gain comfort from open and direct support, their feelings of grief may be intensified by colleagues 'acting normal'. Whereas others may appreciate support being given in a more controlled and predictable way and worry about being unexpectedly caught off guard. This need may change over time, so do check in with them to see how they are experiencing support from colleagues.
- **Offer a phased return to work** which can be reviewed through regular supportive check-ins.
- **Offer an Employee Assistance Programme**, counselling or psychotherapy to support with their emotional wellbeing in a confidential space.

Once Back at Work



- Let them know that your door is open and **set regular meetings throughout the first year to touch base** and see if their needs have changed. They may require more regular check-ins at the beginning.
- **Ensure line managers are aware of any support** that has been put in place or needs to be put in place.
- **Notice changes in their work pattern.** Are they struggling to concentrate? Are they suddenly working more than they used to? Both may indicate a need for more understanding and support.
- **Make a note of the child's birthday and anniversary,** and other key days such as Mother's/Father's Day. Remember that the days and weeks leading up to significant days can be more challenging than the day itself, so make a note before this time to acknowledge that with them.



- **Don't worry about making your employee sadder by addressing their grief.** The death of a child is devastating and they will be sad. By maintaining open communication about their wellbeing, you are reassuring them that they are in an emotionally safe environment.
- **Don't try to offer platitudes, unhelpful reassurance,** or make assumptions about how they must be feeling.
- **Don't share information without their consent** or deviate from the terminology they use.
- **Don't perceive a run of good days for them being 'over it',** be prepared for fluctuations.

- **Don't forget that concentration can be deeply impacted** following an unexpected death of a child. Be mindful if your employee is working in an environment where concentration is critical, such as around heavy goods, machinery, chemicals, electrical tools, etc.

Colleagues

Learning that someone in your workplace has experienced the devastating death of a child can have a huge impact on everyone in the workplace. Whether or not you work closely with them you are likely to feel worry, concern and sadness for them. The death might bring back feelings from another time in your life, remind you of someone who died, or make you feel more anxious about your loved ones dying. Be kind to yourself at this time and reach out for support if you feel these feelings persist.

Supporting your bereaved colleague/friend:

- Allow the bereaved person to express whatever they are feeling, even if these feelings seem intense and frightening. Listening is enough.
- Use the child's name.
- Use the person's words and follow their lead. This will help them to feel understood.
- Resist the urge to 'reassure' them, or 'find positives' in an effort to cheer them up. "At least..." statements can be very painful.
- Try not to offer 'reassurance' on things you are not certain about and which might remain uncertain. For example, "I'm sure they'll find the answer...", "You'll feel better by then..." or "Everything will be okay...". It's okay just to listen or admit that you don't know what to say but that you are there to offer support.
- Never tell the grieving person what they should do or how they should feel. Everyone reacts differently and it is important to accept these differences.
- Do not compare their experience with your own or anyone else's.
- Don't share information without their consent, this includes on social media.
- Ask them what feels helpful and understand that this may change over time.
- Bereaved parents often want to talk about their child and be allowed to remember them. Share your memories with them.
- Offer practical help and support where appropriate, such as gentle reminders of work-related matters. "It is the team meeting today after lunch, I'm there for you if it will help." It can be hard to retain information and hard to face tasks which are out of routine.



- Remember special dates and celebrations can be tough. Watch out for your colleague in the time leading up to these events and let them know you are thinking of them.
- Be sensitive and mindful of announcing pregnancy in the workplace.
- If you can't always find the words, a simple gesture can let them know you remember and care.
- Be patient and empathetic. Remember that the death of a baby or child is not something that someone can 'get over'. Good days do not indicate that the grieving work has been complete, there will be other waves of grief, some which seem to come out of the blue.

Ideas for Remembrance or Passing on Your Sympathy

You may want to club together as an office or team to show your sympathy and thoughts to the family. Practical gifts such as nutritiously prepared meals, or hampers of essentials can be helpful if you are unsure of the family's wishes.

Some families may have an idea of a specific tribute that they would appreciate contributions towards. You may know the family well enough to select something which will feel personal and meaningful.

Our **resource section** has some ideas, including books, which might feel appropriate.

We also have a range of **remembrance gifts**.

And **sympathy cards**.



Well-being for You

The death of a child is a tragic event which can shake the whole community. Your feelings are valid, and your own well-being is also important at this time. There is an old saying "you can't pour from an empty jug" and this is very true when it comes to supporting others through their grief. Be gentle on yourself and allow yourself time for self-care. You will be in a better position to be the support you would like to be. Self-care might look different for different people, but here are some ideas:

Quiet moments of self-care

- Snuggle under a soft blanket or wear your favourite jumper.
- Read a good book.
- Listen to music.
- Take a warm fragrant bath.
- Bake a tasty treat, noticing the feel of the ingredients between your fingers and the sounds and smells as it cooks.



- Stroke or care for a pet or cuddle your loved ones.
- Write down your thoughts.

Active moments of self-care:

- Go for a walk or run; getting outside in the fresh air or in a natural space is a wonderful way to reset.
- Take the dog for an extended walk, maybe on a different route, and notice the sights and sounds around you.
- Swim and allow the water to wash over you, and as it does, imagine the emotions flowing through your body and being swept away.
- Do some gardening.
- Take on a **physical challenge**.



Contact us

Bereavement Support Helpline: 0808 802 6868
(open weekdays 10am - 2pm and weekends 6pm - 10pm)
Email: Support@lullabytrust.org.uk