

Supporting an employee after a death

Employers should consider that everyone deals with death differently, and each employee's needs will be different.

Supporting an employee can help:

- them feel valued
- reduce their stress or anxiety
- avoid or reduce sick leave
- keep a good working relationship
- keep the workplace productive

4. When an employee tells you about the death

When an employee tells you about the death, it's good practice to:

- offer your condolences
- assure them they do not need to come to work if they do not want to, and make it clear that work should come second
- ask how they'd like to keep in touch
- ask if there's any important work they need someone else to cover, if appropriate

If someone is upset they might not be able to talk for long, or someone else might contact you on their behalf. If this happens, it can help to follow up with an email, or call them a few days later.

Communicating in a calm, empathetic way can help employees feel supported, and help ease their anxiety about work.

Keeping in touch while an employee is off

In the first few days after a death it's important to communicate with the employee.

When you get in touch, it's good practice to ask:

- how they are
- how they'd like to be in contact while they're off, for example by phone or email, and how often
- if they want you to let others know about the death
- if they want to be contacted by others from work, for example to offer their support or condolences
- if they need any information or support from you, and signpost to any support that's available to them
- if they've thought about returning to work, if appropriate

Be careful not to pressure them into making any decisions before they're ready.

[Read more about keeping in touch with an employee during absence.](#)

If they need time off

Check your workplace's bereavement policy to see how much leave your workplace can provide.

If your workplace does not have a policy, it's good practice to talk to your employee and:

- check their [legal right to time off](#) during bereavement, for example parental bereavement leave
- consider their personal circumstances, including different religious and cultural practices
- look at what you've offered other bereaved employees, to make sure you're treating everyone fairly
- offer some paid time off for bereavement if possible (you might call this 'compassionate', 'bereavement' or 'special' leave)
- talk about using sick leave, holiday or unpaid leave to cover their time off, if you're unable to offer other paid leave for bereavement
- ask if they need other support

It's a good idea to have a bereavement policy if you do not have one. [Read more about the benefits of a bereavement policy.](#)

Returning to work

It might not be appropriate to talk about returning to work in the first days of bereavement. But keeping in touch can allow you to have an open discussion about:

- how the employee is coping
- when they might be ready to return to work
- your workplace's policy on bereavement
- any adjustments that might help with their return, for example a phased return or a temporary change in duties

How quickly someone returns to work will be different for everyone. Someone might be unsure or not be able to judge how they'll feel when they return. Keeping in touch and talking about adjustments can help plan their return.

[Find out about the procedure you should have when someone returns to work.](#)

Ongoing support

Once they've returned to work, the employee might still need extra support or time off.

This might be because of developments following a bereavement, such as:

- grief symptoms affecting their performance, for example not being able to sleep, think or concentrate
- depression or another mental health condition
- extra responsibilities, for example helping a dependant

How your workplace deals with requests for extra support or time off depends on its bereavement or absence policies.

Even if you do not have a policy, you must follow the law by:

- not discriminating, for example if the employee's mental health condition is classed as a disability
- making ['reasonable adjustments'](#) to support an employee who has a disability

You should talk to the employee and discuss what's best for your employee's physical and mental health in the long term.

Doing things proactively can help prevent problems. For example:

- encouraging an open and supportive working environment for everyone
- signposting staff to your workplace's employee assistance programme (EAP), if there's one available
- sharing other support that's available outside your workplace, for example [Cruse Bereavement Care](#)

It's also likely the employee will be more productive if they feel they're getting the right support.

Mental health

Mental health conditions like anxiety and depression are common for anyone who's experienced a death.

If someone has a mental health issue after a bereavement, it's a good idea to talk to them to find out what support they might need at work.

[Find out how to support someone at work with signs of a mental health issue.](#)

If a mental health condition is a disability

As some mental health conditions are treated as disabilities under the law, you should make sure you:

- do not discriminate against someone with a disability
- make '[reasonable adjustments](#)' for an employee who has a disability

More advice and support

You can get more advice and support from:

- [Cruse Bereavement Care](#) on handling bereavement, including training for employers
- [Dying Matters](#) on talking about dying, death and bereavement
- [Miscarriage Association](#) on handling miscarriage and stillbirth