



Bereavement Leave Policy Guide





Introduction

Bereavement leave is a crucial part of supporting employees through difficult times. It's vital that businesses have clear, compassionate policies in place to assist staff when they lose a loved one.

The Employment Bill 2024 has suggested more protection, and expected empathy, towards employees dealing with a bereavement close to them. The expectation, still to be formally approved, is for at least one week of unpaid leave for each occasion.

This guide covers the essentials of bereavement leave for employers, outlining statutory rights such as unpaid 'reasonable' time off and two weeks of paid Parental Bereavement Leave. It emphasises flexibility beyond legal obligations, encouraging policies that offer paid leave, phased returns, and tailored support. Employers are advised to train managers in handling grief sensitively, provide Employee Assistance Programmes, and maintain clear communication. By fostering a compassionate culture, businesses can improve employee loyalty, productivity, and overall workplace wellbeing.

Key entitlements and flexibility for employers

Legally, employees are entitled to 'reasonable' unpaid time off to manage bereavement, with more specific Parental Bereavement Leave providing two weeks of paid leave for the loss of a child. However, employers often exceed these minimums, offering additional paid or flexible leave to show care and consideration.

This is more than just a legal requirement, it's about fostering a supportive, empathetic workplace where employees can grieve without additional stress. Clear communication of entitlements and ensuring managers handle these requests with sensitivity is essential. Building flexibility into your policies allows employees to take extra time if needed, either through holiday, unpaid leave, or even phased returns.





What this means for employers

1. Flexibility beyond statutory entitlements: While the law provides guidelines, employers should aim for more compassionate policies. Offering paid leave, additional time off, or alternative working patterns is crucial, particularly when staff are facing loss.

2. Equip managers with empathy: Bereavement is a sensitive matter, so it's essential that managers are trained to handle these situations with understanding. This includes offering support on return to work and maintaining discretion around the employee's needs.

3. Tailored approaches: Grief impacts people differently. Therefore, offering flexible working arrangements, such as remote work or flexible hours, can help ease an employee back into the workplace. In many cases, a phased return may be more beneficial.

4. Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs): Access to grief counselling through EAPs is another key tool. When employees have professional emotional support, they're more likely to feel valued and cared for.

5. Compassionate culture: Creating an environment where employees feel comfortable requesting leave without fear of judgment boosts trust. Staff who feel supported during difficult times tend to remain loyal, reducing turnover and fostering a culture of care.

Supporting your workforce effectively

Ensuring a supportive approach includes:

- **Clear, well-communicated policies:** Employees should know what leave is available, who to speak to, and how the process works.
- **Structured support:** Consider offering professional grief counselling and mental health support.
- **Flexible options for returning to work:** Adjust workloads or allow phased returns.
- **Continuous engagement:** Once the employee is back, regular check-ins can help ensure they are managing well.



Policy considerations

A clear bereavement policy should cover:

- **Eligibility:** Who qualifies for bereavement leave, including immediate family or close relatives.
- **Duration:** Define how much paid or unpaid leave is provided, especially for close family losses.
- **Parental bereavement:** Clearly outline statutory rights for parents.
- **Flexible working post-leave:** Offer the option for flexible working hours or a phased return to ease re-entry into the workplace.
- **Mental health support:** Ensure employees know they can access resources like EAPs and counselling services.



The business impact

Offering robust bereavement support fosters loyalty and reduces employee turnover. Companies that show understanding and flexibility during difficult times build stronger relationships with staff, enhancing workplace culture, employee engagement, and long-term productivity. A well-supported workforce is not only more resilient but also more productive.

Conclusion

Bereavement policies are about more than just compliance; they are about caring for your workforce in a meaningful way. By showing flexibility, compassion, and providing adequate support, you foster a workplace where employees feel valued, respected, and cared for, even during their most challenging moments.

