



*Celebrating Life,
Dignifying Death*



A guide to
bereavement
support in the
workplace

57%

of employees will have experienced a bereavement in the last five years, and every day more than 600 people quit work to look after older and disabled relatives. *



One-third

of employees bereaved in the past five years did not feel they had received a compassionate response from their employer. **



Less than

One in five

managers feel very confident supporting someone they manage with a bereavement. *



* Hospice UK

** Child Bereavement UK



We want to help and encourage everyone in our community to be comfortable talking about grief - **and that includes the workplace.**

It is almost inevitable that you will experience a grieving colleague, employee, or volunteer who is dealing with the death of a family member, a close friend or perhaps another colleague. Many of us spend a lot of time at work or volunteering and the relationships we develop can become extremely important to us.

Yet most of us still find it difficult to support those who are struggling with grief, as we may be worried about knowing what to say and how to provide the right support.

Coping with bereavement at work can be incredibly challenging but, with the right approach, **you can create a supportive and compassionate environment in your workplace for those experiencing loss and grief.**

Experts at Hospice in the Weald have put together the following practical tips that you may wish to consider as part of supporting the people you work with through bereavement.

01



Encourage open conversations

Warmth, empathy, compassion and active listening will go a long way in supporting a colleague going through bereavement. You certainly don't have to be an expert, but by being thoughtful, compassionate and offering support and flexibility, you can make a big difference at a challenging time. **Let them lead the way**, but it might be helpful to ask your colleague how much they would like you to tell their co-workers and what information they are happy to share.

02



Workplace policies

It's important to be aware of and **understand your organisation's policies and processes on bereavement and compassionate leave** so you can best help the person who has been bereaved. This information should be written clearly in your employee handbook so you can refer to it easily. Ask your HR/Personnel team or senior managers for support if you are unsure about this.



03



What can I do to help you right now?

When someone first loses a loved one

Trying to find the right words to say, when someone's loved one has died can feel quite a daunting prospect, we may even feel like avoiding our colleague in this situation, but please try not to. **Often the best thing can be to keep it simple to show your support, perhaps something like, 'I'm thinking of you' or 'What can I do to help you right now?'** Try not to compare your own experience of loss with them, everyone's experience is unique. Just letting someone know that you are there for them, offering genuine sympathy and compassion can be incredibly helpful.



04



Keeping in contact

If you are supporting someone as their immediate line manager one of the best ways to help them is to **communicate clearly about available leave options**. For many people this is a big cause for concern alongside anxiety about the security of their job and income. Through these conversations you will be able to find out how much bereavement leave and support someone may need, it will also help build understanding and trust with that person.

Also, in this conversation it might be helpful if you can **agree what would be the best way to contact someone during their leave, just to keep in touch and have a regular check in with them**.

05



Understanding the impact of grief

Grief is a normal powerful emotion and can feel very heavy and very difficult. This may seem obvious, but we sometimes forget that the death of someone close is really, really hard. **Grief affects all of us in different ways and at different times**, and it is an ongoing process. It is unique to the individual, as is the death or even the circumstances around the death. For example, the unexpected death of a child will affect a person in a very different way to the expected death of an elderly parent. It is essential to be able to **provide flexible bereavement support both short and long term**. There should be no shoulds and oughts when talking about 'getting over a loss' either.

Everyone grieves in an individual way. It may be worth keeping an eye out for more 'complicated grief', when perhaps someone's grief turns into a deep depression which lasts for a significant time or possibly no grief reaction at the time of loss.

06



Support on return to work

Grief can be challenging to navigate and knowing that you have the support of colleagues, especially when you return to work can make it much easier to re-establish some level of normality. Sometimes, someone may need more support, and open communication will help to manage stress and anxiety. **You might want to consider offering more flexible working, remote working or a flexible schedule to enable your employee to manage personal responsibilities while transitioning back**, for example, a planned, phased return to work.

07



Talking about a loved one

Many people find it comforting to talk about the person who has died. Sharing anecdotes and happy memories may help them feel closer to their loved one and keep their memory alive. Or they may find it too difficult or upsetting to talk about the person they have lost. This may change as they experience different stages of grief. **Giving someone the opportunity to talk about their loved one in a safe space can help enormously.** However, it's important to understand that the grieving process is highly personal, so other colleagues may need privacy to grieve and handle things on their own.

08



Sharing feelings

Some people may find it hard to talk about their feelings or may worry that colleagues won't understand or don't want to hear about their loss and grief. The majority of people do want to help and provide support but may not know how best to do this. And sometimes people may get it wrong and offer unwanted advice or even make inappropriate comments, being aware of other people's feelings is an important skill. **Once again giving someone the opportunity to talk about their feelings can be an important part of the healing process.**

09



Cultural differences

There are specific considerations to be aware of across all cultures, religions and beliefs.

Mourning periods, mourning services, last rites, funeral rites, travel to grieve with other family, mourning clothing, days of remembrance and length of funeral wake are but a few of the cultural differences around bereavement. Once again open communication will enable understanding, so do speak to the person you manage or your colleague to help you understand their specific needs and beliefs especially at this time when the familiarity of an individuals beliefs can be so important.

10



Stages of grief and milestones

There are many different models and theories of grief to help people try and make sense of what they are going through. It might be helpful to point out that **sometimes someone may feel all of the stages in one day**, oscillating from anger, to guilt, to shock, to disbelief, to bargaining, to acceptance, and sometimes nothing makes sense at all. Other common symptoms are shock and numbness, sadness, feeling overwhelmed, exhaustion, struggling to sleep, anger, guilt and tears.

And this is all quite normal. It unfortunately isn't a neat journey, **and part of your role as a colleague and/or manager is to help someone negotiate the journey** in the best way possible, which will mean different things for different people. Finding (new) meaning may be an important part of your colleagues process. Finding an enduring connection to the person who has died, and moving forward in a life that no longer includes them are both milestones on this journey.

The moment that someone realises that recalling their loved one brings pleasure rather than pain can be a significant moment, and then the realisation that something inside is being repaired and restored.

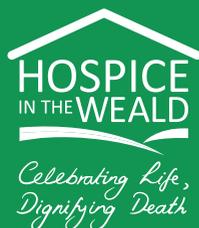


About Hospice in the Weald

Hospice in the Weald provides free care and support for adults and children living with a terminal or life-limiting illness in Kent and East Sussex.

We help people live as well as they can, however long that may be, and provide compassionate end-of-life care, focusing on what matters most to patients and their families. As part of our holistic approach, our specialist staff offers psychological, social, and spiritual support for patients and their loved ones.

Our dedicated teams make an extraordinary difference to people's lives every single day. Hospice in the Weald needs to raise more than £8 million each year, through fundraising, donations and our charity shops, to fund our free care and support.



For more information and resources, including further advice on bereavement, please visit hospiceintheweald.org.uk or call **01892 820 500**

Registered Charity No. 280276



Scan to see our range of bereavement resources