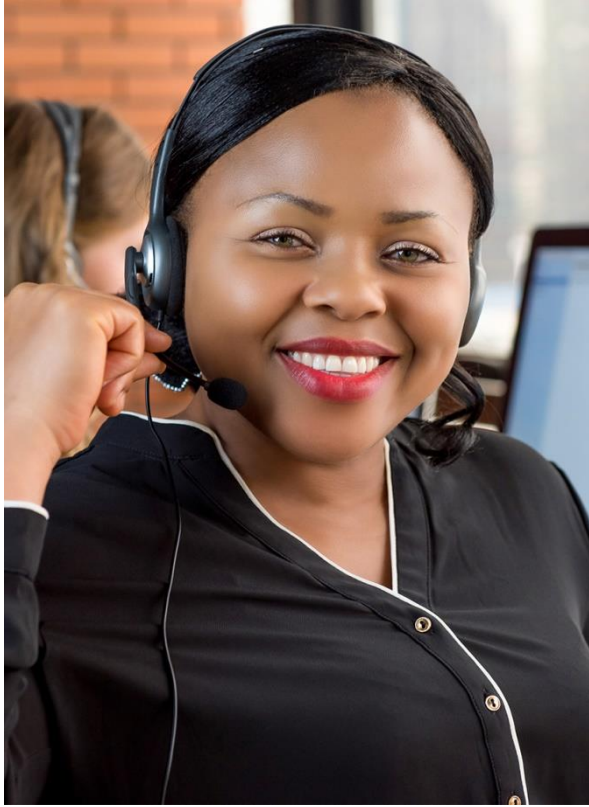


# Toolkit



# MANAGING BEREAVEMENT

## Introduction

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Removing the stigma around certain caring issues such as death and dying, bereavement, mental health conditions, dementia etc is essential to ensure that employees get the support they need when they need it and prevent them leaving work or being unable to return to work.

Bereavement is something many carers have to face and it is important to remember that we all cope with, and react to, the death of a loved one differently and consequently need different levels, and types, of support. If someone has been caring for a loved one for some time, don't underestimate the impact of the bereavement – the loss can seem even greater for carers.

Carers have not only lost a loved one but also their caring role too and with that comes a range of emotions: relief, guilt at feeling relief, exhaustion, loneliness, abandonment. There are no time limits on grief, and no set pattern of emotions and behaviours that everybody follows. It is also important to remember that grief does not always happen straight away and can resurface later and at significant times/days such as anniversaries or birthdays.

## About this toolkit

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This Toolkit has been produced by Employers for Carers (EFC) to help you to:

- support an employee whose caring responsibilities may have come to an end and who is facing bereavement
- raise awareness and increase the uptake of your policies and practices that support carers and employees facing bereavement
- explore workplace and external support that may help your employees in this situation

## The law in relation to bereavement

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**The Employment Rights Act 1996** gives all employees the right to take “reasonable time off” to deal with any unexpected situations involving a dependant such as the death of a dependant. A dependant includes a husband, wife or partner, child or parent, someone

living with the employee as part of their family and someone who depends on the employee for care.

At your discretion, this time off can be paid. CIPD (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development) research suggests that, in general, most employees are given five days paid leave to deal with emergencies.

**The Equality Act 2010** protects employees with protected characteristics from unlawful discrimination. When granting leave for emergencies/compassionate leave you must ensure that you do not treat some employees less favourably than others because of a protected characteristic.

Protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

For example, employers should accommodate religious beliefs and customs where it is reasonable and practicable to do so. Many religions have bereavement requirements and you should carefully consider these against the business reasons for not observing the belief or custom. More information can be found at [www.acas.org.uk/religionorbelief](http://www.acas.org.uk/religionorbelief)

Employees experiencing mental health difficulties such as anxiety, depression or post-traumatic stress disorder, which can be as a consequence of bereavement, may be considered disabled in some cases. If this is the case then the Equality Act 2010 requires employers to make reasonable adjustments for these employees to remove any workplace barriers.

## Top ten tips

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1. Create a carer aware workplace. Raise awareness of caring by putting information about caring on staff intranets, in staff rooms, handbooks and policies.
2. Ensure you have a Bereavement Policy and train key staff. Communicate your workplace policies and support and provide advice and information for employees.
3. Be supportive and understanding; don't make assumptions about how the employee is feeling or about what support they might need. If someone has been caring for a loved one for some time don't underestimate the impact of the bereavement. Carers have not only lost a loved one but their caring role too.
4. Create an open and supportive culture in your teams and workplace. You should train and support managers to normalise caring - talk about work-life balance, making specific reference to caring at inductions and reviews/appraisals.

5. Offer time off work to grieve and adjust; initially paid if possible, to alleviate further concerns/anxiety. Stay in regular contact with your employee but don't pressurise them into discussing work or making decisions at this time. Establish what they want other colleagues to know.
6. Offer a phased and flexible return to work – this approach is most likely to support and retain the employee and minimise sickness absence.
7. Communicate regularly with the employee/undertake regular reviews where you can discuss strategies/adjustments that might be needed. Consider offering the employee annual leave/special leave around particularly difficult or significant days eg anniversaries/birthdays.
8. When undertaking annual performance/pay reviews remember to take into account the bereavement – even if much earlier in the year - if an employee's performance has been affected.
9. If your organisation has annual sickness absence limits you should consider excluding some of the leave which was related to the bereavement.
10. Signpost employees to internal sources of support (EAPs/Occupational Health/HR) and external sources of support/bereavement counselling (see end for useful organisations).

## Good practice

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Here are some good practice examples from EFC members:

**Aviva.** Alongside the launch of its carers policy in 2017, Aviva introduced enhanced bereavement leave benefit for the company's UK-based employees. Bereavement leave was increased from 35 hours to 70 hours per holiday year, together with increased leave along these lines for both planned and emergency caring situations.

The carers policy also extended parental leave arrangements to carers, meaning that employees who have caring commitments can request up to four weeks of unpaid leave per year, subject to a maximum 18-week cap. Aviva's working carers can request adjustments to their working patterns if needed, for example moving to part-time hours.

**British Gas/Centrica.** Centrica offers 10 days paid leave to all employees who are caring followed by another 10 days that can be taken if matched with annual leave. Carers leave is available to employees from their first day of employment, as is flexible working, which

also helps staff to balance work and caring responsibilities. A well-established Carers Network provides information and advice to employees throughout their caring journey, and Centrica's Employee Assistance Programme also provides carer-specific support, including for employees who are facing bereavement.

**BT Group.** The company has long recognised the importance of supporting employees through caring and bereavement, including promoting mental wellbeing. It provides support for employees during bereavement including support on return to work. BT has a wide ranging toolkit of support for carers which includes flexible working, the BT Carers Passport, the BT Carers Network, a specific 'Family and You' portal for employees with caring responsibilities and a range of 'knowledge' calls on subjects such as dementia.

**Age UK.** Age UK has introduced carers' leave as a new and additional provision to complement existing forms of leave which include dependants leave, compassionate leave, bereavement leave and domestic leave. Paid carers leave up to the equivalent of one working week per annum is offered in addition to further (unpaid) leave if required.

**Hyde Group** (housing associations) offers both dependants leave (5 days a year) and special/carers leave (5 days a year).

## Useful organisations

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- Cruse: for employers, Cruse offers training and consultancy on managing bereavement at work, and workplace support after the death of a colleague. For bereaved employees, Cruse offers support through a network of local services and helpline. [www.cruse.org.uk/bereavement-at-work](http://www.cruse.org.uk/bereavement-at-work)
- The Dying Matters Coalition aims to raise public awareness about the importance of talking more openly about dying, death and bereavement. Dying Matters has produced a wide range of information about end of life issues. [www.dyingmatters.org](http://www.dyingmatters.org)
- Child Bereavement UK produces guidance for employees and employers on returning to work. [www.childbereavementuk.org](http://www.childbereavementuk.org)
- Macmillan Cancer Support have comprehensive information and guidance for employers about cancer and bereavement at work. [www.macmillan.org.uk](http://www.macmillan.org.uk)
- Carers UK has practical information and advice on bereavement including information on practical matters following a death and also about coping when caring ends. [www.carersuk.org](http://www.carersuk.org)

## Three next steps

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- Circulate the 'Top ten tips' to your team and colleagues.
- Monitor the take up of support by colleagues who have been facing bereavement and determine the benefits to them and to your organisation.
- Tell members of your team that your organisation is a member of EFC and that all our resources are available to them. Circulate your organisation's membership code to your team so that they can access these resources.

## Contact Employers for Carers

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