

M I L B A N K G R O U P

Bereavement and Pregnancy Loss

A Guide for Managers

Supporting your colleagues through loss - what to say, what to do, and where to get help.

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Why this guide exists

Losing someone close to you is one of the hardest things a person goes through. When it happens to someone in your team, you might not know what to say or do. That is completely normal.

This guide is here to help you support your colleague with confidence. It is not about getting it perfect. It is about being human, knowing what the policy says, and making sure your colleague feels supported rather than alone.

What our policies say

We have a number of policies to support Bereavement and Loss.

Bereavement leave - death of a close family member

Family members covered: partner, parent, child (over 18), grandparent, sibling, stepchild or stepparent.

Entitlement: 1 week paid. Available from day one of employment.

Beyond 1 week: additional leave may be agreed (annual leave, unpaid leave, or adjusted working) at your discretion.

Notice: the colleague just needs to let you know as soon as they can. There is no form to fill in.

Your job: confirm the leave and payment arrangements, and let Payroll/HR know.

Parental bereavement leave - death of a child under 18 or stillbirth after 24 weeks

Who is entitled to the leave: parents (natural, adoptive, foster, intended surrogacy), guardians, and their partners.

Entitlement: 2 weeks paid. Can be taken as one block or two separate weeks. Available from day one.

When: any time in the 56 weeks following the death. It does not have to be taken immediately.

Pay: statutory parental bereavement pay applies (for those with 26 weeks' service). Enhanced pay per the Parental Bereavement Leave policy.

Notice: within the first 56 days, no advance notice is needed. After 56 days, one week's notice.

Important: if the colleague experienced a stillbirth, they are also entitled to maternity or paternity leave on top of parental bereavement leave.

Pregnancy Loss before 24 weeks

Who is entitled to the leave: any employee who experiences a pregnancy loss before 24 weeks..

Entitlement: 1 week paid. Available from day one of employment.

Beyond 1 week: additional leave may be agreed (annual leave, unpaid leave, or adjusted working) at your discretion.

Notice: the colleague just needs to let you know as soon as they can. There is no form to fill in, no medical evidence is needed. Some colleagues will not have told anyone at work they are pregnant. Finding out about the loss may be the first you hear of it.

Your job: confirm the leave and payment arrangements, and let Payroll/HR know.

Other losses - compassionate leave

If someone outside the close family list has died - an aunt, uncle, close friend, ex-partner, or someone else important to the colleague - there is no automatic entitlement.

Use your judgement. Consider the closeness of the relationship, the colleague's state, and whether a short period of paid or unpaid leave would be the right thing to do. Talk to the People Team if you are unsure.

When a colleague tells you

The most important thing you can do in the first conversation is listen. You do not need to fix anything, solve anything, or know exactly what to say. You just need to be kind.

Step by step - the first conversation

1. **Stop what you are doing.** Give them your full attention. If you are busy, say so honestly and find a quiet moment as soon as you can.
2. **Acknowledge the loss.** Say you are sorry. You do not need to say anything clever. "I am so sorry" is enough.
3. **Ask what they need.** They might not know yet. That is fine. Let them know you will support them.
4. **Explain the leave.** Tell them they can take time off, that they will be paid, and that you will sort the details. Keep it simple - they are not in a state to process policy.
5. **Ask about confidentiality.** What, if anything, would they like the team to know? Respect their wishes.
6. **Cover their work.** Tell them not to worry about handovers. You will manage it.
7. **Agree how to stay in touch.** Text, call, or leave them alone? Ask their preference. Follow it.

What to say - and what not to say

You might worry about saying the wrong thing. This table will help.

Say this	Not this
I am so sorry for your loss.	At least they are not suffering any more.
Take whatever time you need.	I know how you feel.
I am here when you are ready to talk.	Everything happens for a reason.
Would you like me to let the team know, or would you prefer to?	You need to be strong.
You do not need to worry about work right now.	At least it was early on. (pregnancy loss)
There is no rush to come back.	You can always try again. (pregnancy loss)
How are you doing today? (when they return)	Are you not over it yet? (weeks/months later)

Pregnancy loss

Pregnancy loss is much more common than most people think. Around 1 in 4 pregnancies end in miscarriage. As a manager, it is very likely that at some point you will support a colleague through this.

Loss can happen at any stage and in many forms: miscarriage, ectopic pregnancy, molar pregnancy, stillbirth, neonatal loss, or unsuccessful fertility treatment. Each one is a real loss, however early it happens.

Some colleagues will not have told anyone at work they were pregnant. Finding out about the loss may be the first you hear of the pregnancy. Respect this - do not ask questions about why they did not tell you sooner.

Which policy applies?

Stillbirth after 24 weeks: the colleague is entitled to full maternity/paternity leave AND parental bereavement leave.

Loss before 24 weeks (miscarriage, ectopic, molar): 1 week pregnancy loss leave.

Partners: partners are affected too. They may be entitled to bereavement or compassionate leave. Ask what they need.

Fertility treatment loss: our Fertility Journey policy covers leave after unsuccessful treatment.

Unsure which policy applies, contact the People Team. Do not leave the colleague waiting while you work it out - agree the time off first, sort the paperwork after.

What if a colleague experiences a miscarriage at work?

This can happen. A colleague who begins to miscarry may experience heavy bleeding, severe pain, faintness, or distress. They will be frightened and embarrassed.

Immediate steps:

1. Give them privacy and support. Stay calm.
2. Help them get to a safe, private space. Make sure they have access to a toilet.
3. Ask if they need an ambulance. If they are very unwell (especially with an ectopic pregnancy), call 999 immediately.
4. Offer to call their partner or someone they trust.
5. Arrange for them to get home safely - a taxi, a colleague to drive them, or emergency services.

6. Cover their work without making a fuss. If colleagues ask, say something simple: "[Name] has had to leave early. We'll let you know when they are back."
7. Check in on them the next day by text. Keep it brief and kind.

Supporting the return to work

Coming back to work after a bereavement or pregnancy loss can be overwhelming. Your colleague may feel anxious, tearful, or numb. They may seem fine one day and struggle the next. All of this is normal.

Grief does not follow a straight line. Be prepared for difficult moments weeks or months after the loss - anniversaries, due dates, a colleague's pregnancy announcement, or even just a bad day.

Conversation starters for the return to work

"Is there anything I can do to make coming back easier for you?"

"Would you like to meet up before your first day back?"

"How would you like me to handle it if you become upset at work?"

"Would you like me to let colleagues know you are back, or would you prefer to just come in quietly?"

"Is there anything about your workload or hours that we should look at for now?"

Practical things to think about

Work environment: are there colleagues who are pregnant, or who have recently had babies? Your colleague may find this difficult. You cannot change the situation, but you can acknowledge it.

Workload: a phased return or temporary adjustment may help. Discuss it. Do not assume they want less responsibility - some people prefer to stay busy.

Ongoing support: check in regularly in the weeks after they return. Not every day, but enough that they know you have not forgotten.

Confidentiality: do not share details of their loss with anyone unless they have asked you to. If payroll or HR need to know, ask the colleague how they would like it communicated.

Looking after yourself

Supporting someone through loss can be emotionally difficult, especially if you have been through something similar yourself. That is completely normal and it does not mean you are not coping.

You do not have to carry this alone. If you are finding it hard, talk to your own manager, the People Team, or use whatever support is available to you. Looking after yourself is not a weakness - it is what allows you to keep supporting your team.

Quick reference - when it happens

Keep this page somewhere you can find it quickly.

Your checklist

1. Listen. Say you are sorry. Do not try to fix it.
2. Confirm they can take time off and will be paid (up to 5 days bereavement / 2 weeks parental bereavement).
3. Ask what they want the team to know.
4. Cover their work. Do not ask them for handovers.
5. Agree how you will stay in touch while they are away.
6. Let Payroll/HR know the dates and payment arrangements.
7. When they return, have a quiet conversation. Ask what would help.
8. Keep checking in over the following weeks.
9. If you are unsure about anything - contact peopleteam@milbank.co.uk.

Policies referenced in this guide:

Compassionate and Bereavement Leave policy / Enhanced Parental Bereavement Leave policy / Fertility Journey policy / Time off for Dependents policy

All policies are available online. If you cannot find them, contact peopleteam@milbank.co.uk

This guide is for managers within The Milbank Group. It is not for external distribution. Version 1, April 2026.