

# Pregnancy and baby loss at work



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**Grief is very personal, and everyone responds to it in a different way. This guide is offered as a support resource for you and your employer.**

**Part 1** Page 4 – 15 is a guide for you. It includes advice that you might find helpful if you are at work or thinking about returning to work.

**Part 2** Page 16 – 31 is a guide for your employer, so you may wish to share it with your workplace. Many managers are grateful to be given guidance, especially if they have not previously worked with colleagues who have experienced pregnancy or baby loss.



## Please use this guide in whatever way you find most helpful.

Throughout this guide the word ‘manager’ is used. This means a more senior person in your workplace who is directly responsible for you. Depending on where you work, this could be a head of department, a commanding officer, or simply the person you call your ‘boss’.

For more information about the physical and emotional challenges of pregnancy loss, bereavement, remembering your baby, and support for different family members, take a look at the Sands Bereavement Support book [sands.org.uk/book](https://sands.org.uk/book) which explores these and other areas in more detail.

For immediate support you can contact our Bereavement Support Team on **0808 164 3332** or [helpline@sands.org.uk](mailto:helpline@sands.org.uk), or make use of our social media platforms, online community and local support groups.

We are here for you for as long as you need us.

# Telling your employer & colleagues

Pregnancy and baby loss is a very personal experience, and it is completely up to you what to share with colleagues. Your manager and HR department (if you have one) will need to know why you are off work, but beyond that you can share as many or as few details as feels comfortable.

**Some people find it helpful if others know what has happened, as they are more likely to behave sensitively and offer support, which otherwise they might not know was needed. However, others want and need more privacy. There is no right or wrong way to feel, it's important to do what feels right for you.**

Sharing your experience at work may open up unexpected conversations as there may be others in your workplace who have also experienced pregnancy and baby loss, but have never disclosed it.

Even if you want your colleagues to know what has happened, you may be uncertain about how to share the news. If you prefer not to do so yourself, you can ask your manager to tell others on your behalf.

Agree with your manager what information they should share, when they should share it, and who they should tell. For example, if you named your baby, you may want your colleagues to be told their name and be reassured that you would like them to use it. Similarly, if you do not want others to know, make sure that your manager knows this.



**If you need support in communicating your needs to your manager or employer, the Sands Bereavement Support Services Team may be able to help you think through the best way of doing this. There is a template email on page 14 of this guide which may help you, or your manager find the words to tell colleagues.**

# Being honest with yourself and your manager

The early stages of bereavement can be very challenging. Above all, be kind to yourself, but also be honest with yourself and your manager about the work you are able to do. They should not make assumptions about how you are feeling based on what happened to you, the length of the pregnancy, whether you have given birth or are a partner.

There may be times or dates that you find especially difficult, such as your baby's birthday, due date, or anniversaries. The build up to these can also feel challenging. You may wish to take annual leave around these times to give yourself some space. The feelings which can surround these key dates are not a sign that your grief is getting 'worse', as it is normal to have many different emotions when bereaved, and to move between different emotions quickly.



**You may need to attend medical or psychological support appointments following your pregnancy. If a medical review or investigation is taking place to find out why your baby died, this can also be emotionally challenging. If you tell your manager what is happening and when you need time off, they will better understand and support you.**



# When to return to work

Returning to work can bring up a range of different emotions. Some bereaved colleagues look forward to getting back to work as a way of distracting themselves or representing a sense of 'normality', whereas others find the prospect very daunting.

It is important that you take as much time off as you need. Many bereaved colleagues find a phased return to work or reduced hours helpful. A good employer will realise that it is best for everyone if you return when you are ready, that if you try to do too much too soon you will not work effectively, and that you may also need to take more time off in the longer term. There are some occupations which may present additional challenges. These may include physical work when your body is recovering from giving birth or you are experiencing the tiredness which can come with grief, work which brings you into contact with situations which are emotionally draining or which mirror your experience of pregnancy or birth, working in healthcare or with young children, or work which requires you to travel and be separated from your partner or other family members.

**Again, it's important to be honest with your manager and explore different tasks that may be easier or more appropriate for you to do. If you feel apprehensive about seeing your colleagues again, you could arrange to go into work for an informal coffee before you return or ask a trusted colleague to meet you outside of work.**



## Workplace entitlements

Entitlements vary slightly across the different nations of the UK, and laws may change, so check the latest information and ask your manager what leave, pay, benefits, and adjustments you are entitled to.

Some employers will offer you the minimum legal entitlements, but others will be more generous and flexible. With so much to consider, it can be hard to remember details, so ask your manager to put everything in writing so you can review what has been said and take time to make decisions.



## Feeling safe and supported at work

Your workspace needs to feel safe for you. If you work at a desk you may choose to have a photograph, or something with your baby's name on it, so that they feel close to you. This may be particularly important if it is not something you can do at home.

### Please note that



**You may share a space with others who are apprehensive about seeing photographs. This could be for a variety of reasons.**



**Some bereaved colleagues prefer not to have anything on public display which feels private.**



**Some may not have a work space where it is possible to display photographs.**



**Other ways of keeping memories close include wearing a special piece of jewellery, or carrying something personal to your baby in a pocket or wallet.**

It is important that you give yourself permission to 'opt out' of workplace celebrations which you find difficult. You may have colleagues who are pregnant or who have new babies, and who want to share their excitement. Social gatherings, especially at sensitive times such as Christmas, other religious festivals, or coinciding with anniversaries, may also be a challenge.

You may also feel isolated, either because you work remotely or because your colleagues are unsure whether to include you in conversations or activities, probably in an attempt to be thoughtful. If you feel comfortable, speak to your manager or a supportive colleague about how you feel and what you need. If you need support in communicating your needs the Sands Bereavement Support Services Team may be able to help you think through the best way of doing this.

Medium to large employers and organisations will have HR departments who can provide advice, and some workplaces also have dedicated employee assistance programmes, welfare officers, chaplains or others who can give support. If you are not sure whether this is the case where you work, you can ask your manager.

**If you work for a smaller organisation and there is little or no support available at work, please do contact us at Sands, we are here to support you.**

# Showing emotions at work

Some people worry that showing emotions is not 'professional', but a good manager will want to support you as best they can. You may find it helpful to go into your workplace to see colleagues informally before you return to work, as this can help overcome any concerns you have about seeing them for the first time. If you are concerned about crying in front of a colleague or manager, try to imagine how you would react if it was one of your colleagues who was bereaved and crying in front of you. You would want to support them, so remember that other people will want to support you. They may not always know the best way to do this, and sometimes they may get it wrong, but most people will be genuinely concerned, eager to help, and happy to take the lead from you.

One emotion that can accompany grief is a sense of guilt. You may feel guilty or as if you are letting colleagues down if you do not think you are doing your job properly, or if you are not as productive as you were previously. This is another reason why you and your manager need to discuss workload, responsibilities and hours, so that expectations are realistic and the work you are given does not put you or anyone else at risk. Even simple day to day tasks can sometimes feel overwhelming, so try to see each step you take as a positive achievement.



**You may find it helpful to go into your workplace to see colleagues informally before you return to work, as this can help overcome any concerns you have about seeing them for the first time.**

## Template correspondence

The wording here is simply a suggestion: you can adapt it as you wish, as it is important that you feel comfortable with the words used.

### Template 1: Initial letter or email to your manager

Dear [manager's name]

I am very sorry to have to share some bad news.

My baby [baby's name, if you have given them one and want to share it] was born on [date] but sadly died at birth/shortly after birth.

[OR]

Sadly I/my partner had a miscarriage [at number of weeks] on [date].

Obviously, this is a distressing time for me/us, but I realise that you and I will need to have a practical conversation about leave, support, and about how much information to share with other colleagues who may also find this difficult. I am not sure when I will feel ready to speak, but please do keep in touch with me.

I am/we are able to access bereavement support from the baby loss charity Sands. They have suggested that I make you aware that they also provide resources and practical guidance for managers, which you may find useful to look at before we speak [insert link] and that they offer support to anyone who is affected by baby loss and pregnancy loss.

Their contact details are: Sands free Helpline: 0808 164 3332 or [helpline@sands.org.uk](mailto:helpline@sands.org.uk) Website: [sands.org.uk](http://sands.org.uk)

Thank you for your understanding.

Warm regards,

## Template 2: letter or email to your colleagues, if you wish to share the news with them yourself.

Dear [team]

I am very sorry to have to share some bad news.

My baby [baby's name, if you have given them one and want to share it] was born on

[date] but sadly died at birth/shortly after birth.

[OR]

Sadly I/my partner had a miscarriage [at number of weeks] on [date].

Obviously, this is a distressing time for me/us, and I realise that you may also find this news difficult, but I wanted to share with you what has happened.

I am/we are able to access bereavement support from the baby loss charity Sands.

They have suggested that I make you aware that they also provide resources for work colleagues, which you may find useful to look at [insert link] and that they offer support to anyone who is affected by baby loss and pregnancy loss. Their contact details are:

Sands free Helpline: 0808 164 3332 or [helpline@sands.org.uk](mailto:helpline@sands.org.uk)

Website: [sands.org.uk](http://sands.org.uk)

I am currently on leave but I hope and plan to return to work [on X date if you know it] and

it will be good to see you then. I or [manager's name] may be in touch with you nearer the time to explain more details about my return to work.

Thank you for your understanding.

Warm regards,

## Part 2: Guidance for your employer

It can be difficult to know what to do or say when a colleague has experienced pregnancy or baby loss, whether it was your colleague who was pregnant or their partner. It is also normal to feel uncomfortable talking about such personal matters at work, but many people tell us how important a supportive workplace is to their wellbeing. This guide seeks to help you understand pregnancy and baby loss, the impact on the workplace and how to support a bereaved colleague.



**In addition to this guide, Sands also offers a workplace support service and a range of bereavement in the workplace training and resources. These are designed to help you and your team feel more comfortable with pregnancy and baby loss and help build a supportive work environment: [sands.org.uk/BITW](https://sands.org.uk/BITW)**



# Hearing the news

The news of your colleague's pregnancy or baby loss may come of a shock to you. It is normal to feel a mix of emotions, so do take care of yourself and contact Sands bereavement support services if you would like to talk in confidence.

Often finding the right words of support is difficult. Try to use phrases that express compassion and show that you are there to support your colleague, for example:

**"I'm so sorry to hear about what happened"**

**"Do what's right for you, we are here to support you."**

**"Take one step/day at a time."**

**"This support is available... use what is helpful to you and leave what is not."**

**"What was your baby's name? I'd like to hear about them if you feel comfortable?"**

**It is best to avoid phrases such as:**

**"Maybe it was meant to be."**

**"At least you can have more children."**

**"At least you didn't get to know him/her properly."**

**"Everything happens for a reason."**

**"You'll be back to normal soon."**



These types of phrases often come from a good place, and are often used when we want to help someone who is going through a difficult time. However, they can suggest a lack of compassion or understanding so are best avoided.

Grief is unique and everyone will experience it differently so it's important not to assume how a person may think, feel or what they might need at work. Some people worry that showing emotions at work is not "professional", however we are all human and sometimes this will happen. If a colleague is tearful or upset, allow them space to feel what they feel without embarrassment, and listen supportively. A mix of emotions is normal, and you may see your colleague be more frustrated, angry or despondent than usual. Again, try to be understanding and supportive.

Some people find it helpful to share details of what happened to them, so that colleagues are able to offer support, but others might want and need more privacy. It's important that you ask what they need from you and respond respectfully.

You may be asked to share the news with other colleagues on their behalf. There is a template email for this purpose on page 30 of this guide. Agree with your colleague what information they would like you to share, when you should share it, and who you should tell. For example, they may want to share their baby's name and the fact that they are comfortable talking about him/her. Similarly, they may not want others to know, so it's important that you convey this.

There may be others in your workplace who have experienced pregnancy or baby loss but have never disclosed it at work. Always bear this in mind when sharing bad news and offering support. Ensure that all colleagues are made aware of the support which is available to them from Sands. Details can be found on p32.

You may also consider some practical signs of support such as sending a card or gift from colleagues, attending their baby's funeral, or offer to hold a fundraiser in support of their chosen charity.

# Supporting return to work

Some employees welcome the thought of the routine of work and a return to some kind of normality. For others the prospect is very daunting. Therefore, your colleague may choose to take their full leave entitlement or return to work sooner.

It may be necessary to contact them before they return to work to discuss their entitlements and prepare a plan for their return. Choose a contact method they prefer, this could be phone, text, or email. A template email is included on page 28 of this guide, to help you find the right words. Your colleague will have a lot to think about and grief may affect their memory and ability to process information, so putting everything in writing and giving enough time to consider the options is important.

Statutory leave, pay, benefits, and adjustments depend on various factors, including the circumstances of their loss and legal definitions. It's important that you understand these and are comfortable asking your colleague for the information you need.

**Miscarriage** is pregnancy loss before 24 weeks of pregnancy. Some people who have experienced a miscarriage find the term difficult because it does not acknowledge that their baby existed or the depth of their grief. Others will use this term freely, so the advice is to mirror the language used by the colleague to avoid any distress. There is currently no statutory entitlement to paid leave following miscarriage in the UK. However, best practice is recognised as two weeks of paid leave for both parents. Any sick leave taken is protected in law as are any other pregnancy related illness. Compassionate Leave or Time Off For Dependants are also options following miscarriage, depending on individual circumstances.

**Stillbirth** the death of a baby after 24 weeks of completed pregnancy, before or during birth. When a baby is stillborn, parents are entitled to the same pay and leave as if their baby had lived. This includes Statutory Maternity/Paternity Pay and Leave, or Shared Parental Pay and Leave, depending on eligibility criteria. These parents are also entitled to two weeks paid Parental Bereavement Leave, which can be taken at any time within 56 weeks of the death.

**Neonatal death** is the death of a baby shortly after birth regardless of the length of pregnancy. The statutory entitlement for parents whose baby died after birth are the same as for stillbirth above.

**Termination For Medical Reasons (TFMR)** is when a pregnancy is ended because of a life-limiting or life-altering medical condition which affects the baby or mother/birth person. This can be at any stage of pregnancy, therefore the statutory entitlements for parents are as above depending on whether their experience is legally defined as a miscarriage, stillbirth, or neonatal death.

**Sudden Unexpected Death in Infancy (SUDI)** is when a baby under the age of one year dies suddenly and unexpectedly. When a baby under one year of age dies their parents should be entitled to statutory maternity or paternity leave and pay, depending on individual circumstances. These parents are also entitled to 2 weeks paid Bereavement Leave, which can be taken anytime within 56 weeks of the death.

Contact Sands Bereavement Support Services if you would like to discuss a specific case or would like advice around how to approach a certain situation. Contact details can be found on p32.

Being at work can feel overwhelming for those who have been through pregnancy or baby loss. Your colleague may need some time to adjust, and it could be several weeks or months before they are at full capacity at work.

Therefore it's important to discuss workload, responsibilities and hours, so that expectations are realistic and their wellbeing is not at risk. If flexible working is an option, consider things such as phased return, reduced hours, alternative job roles and home working to allow your colleague the time and space they need.

Some people may feel apprehensive about returning to work and seeing colleagues for the first time after their pregnancy. To help with this, organising an informal visit to the workplace before officially returning, or coordinating a meeting outside the work setting, could be supportive. They may find it helpful to talk to a supportive colleague before returning to work or meet up with a colleague in the car park, reception area or similar, so that they do not have to walk into the workplace on their own. Always ask colleagues what might be helpful for them and signpost them to support channels such as employee assistance programmes, welfare officers, or chaplains if they are available.



# Building a supportive workplace

After your colleague returns to work, there are several things to consider to ensure you maintain a supportive and understanding workplace environment.

Colleagues may require time off to attend medical or psychological support appointments. A medical review or investigation to find out why a baby died can be emotionally draining. Try to be understanding of their challenges and flexible in the support you can offer.

There is no normal when it comes to grief, and you may observe some behaviour that you have not experienced before. Some colleagues may display a photograph of their baby, have a tattoo or wear a significant piece of jewellery to remember their baby. Try to recognise their parenthood in these actions and respond with kindness and compassionate curiosity.







**If they have other children, your colleague will also be supporting them while coping with their own grief. This additional responsibility can be overwhelming. Being open to granting time off to aid their other children can be helpful.**

There may be certain times of the year or specific dates that your colleague may find especially difficult, such as their baby's birthday, due date, or anniversaries. The buildup to these can also be challenging. Try to be considerate of leave requests during these significant times to demonstrate empathy and support.

Your colleague may find it difficult to be around others who are pregnant, particularly in the initial weeks and months. They may choose to "opt out" of social events or pregnancy/family related gatherings for this reason. Respect their decision, try to be understanding and open to talking about any adaptations they may need to cope in these circumstances.



**Some people will become pregnant again after their loss. Subsequent pregnancies after a loss can be a source of immense anxiety for bereaved families. Traditional pregnancy-related events such as midwife appointments or scans might not evoke joy as expected.**

**Try to be understanding of any adjustments they may need at work and allow flexibility for any additional medical or psychological support appointments they may need.**



# Template correspondence

## Template 3: email/letter for initial contact with an employee following their baby's stillbirth or neonatal death

Dear XXXXX

I am so sorry to hear about [baby's name if known/your son/daughter/baby]. I recognise that this is a difficult time and our thoughts are with you and [insert family members if known] your family.

We will do our best to support you and, should you need it, we can offer [a referral to occupational health/ employee counselling service/wellbeing service etc.]

We work closely with the charity Sands, who are available to provide bereavement support for you if needed. Their contact details are:

Sands free Helpline: 0808 164 3332 or [helpline@sands.org.uk](mailto:helpline@sands.org.uk)  
Website: [sands.org.uk](http://sands.org.uk)

There is no need to think about work, but I wanted to write and let you know that you are entitled to statutory maternity/ paternity/parental leave and pay which I will arrange for you. A copy of our Baby Loss HR Policy is attached but please free to contact me when you are ready so that we can talk through the practicalities. If you'd prefer, I can contact you again by email or phone; please let me know your preference.

[OR]

As we discussed on the phone... [confirm what was agreed or confirm the options available e.g., funeral date and who will attend, leave length, pay agreed, next contact who/ when, phased return to work etc.]

You also mentioned that you would like me \*not to/\*to tell

your colleagues about [baby's name or your son/daughter/  
baby] so I \*won't say anything unless you ask me to/ will share  
your news with them on [insert day].

Please contact me if there is anything more I can do to support  
you and your family.

Take care

#### **Template 4: email/letter for initial contact with an employee on hearing about their miscarriage.**

Dear XXXXX

I am so sorry to hear about what happened, and recognise that  
this is a difficult time and our thoughts are with you and [insert  
family members if known] your family.

We will do our best to support you and should you need it, we  
can offer [a referral to occupational health/ employee  
counselling service/wellbeing service etc.]

We work closely with the charity Sands, who are available to  
provide bereavement support for you if needed. Their contact  
details are:

Sands free Helpline: 0808 164 3332 or [helpline@sands.org.uk](mailto:helpline@sands.org.uk)  
Website: [sands.org.uk](http://sands.org.uk)

There is no need to think about work now, however I wanted to  
write and let you know that you are entitled to 2 weeks paid  
Miscarriage Leave which I will arrange for you. A copy of our  
Baby Loss HR Policy is attached but please feel free to contact  
me when you are ready so that we can talk through the  
practicalities. If you'd prefer, I can contact you again by email or  
phone, please let me know your preference.

[OR]

As we discussed on the phone.... [confirm what was agreed or confirm the options available i.e., leave length, pay agreed, next contact who/when, phased return to work

etc...]

You also mentioned that you would like me \*not to/\*to tell your colleagues about what happened so I \*won't say anything unless you ask me to/ will share your news with them on [insert day].

Please contact me if there is anything more I can do to support you and your family.

Take care

**Template 5: email to let colleagues know what has happened (if your colleague has asked you to share the news –ask them to approve the draft before sending)**

Dear [team]

I am very sorry to have to share some sad news.

[colleague's name]'s baby [baby's name, if known] was born on [date] but sadly died at birth/ shortly after birth. [colleagues name and their partner] are understandably devastated and they have asked me to share the news with you.

[OR]

Sadly [name] had a miscarriage on [date]. [name and their partner] are devastated and they have asked me to share the news with you.

Obviously, this is a distressing time for [name] and our thoughts are with them and [insert family members if known],

we are doing all we can to support them.

[name] will be on leave until... [what was agreed]

[name] has asked that... [what was agreed around contact, talking about their baby, what happened etc.]

I recognise that this news may be upsetting for you too. We work closely with the baby loss charity Sands, who are available to provide support for you if you would like to talk to someone in confidence.

Sands free Helpline: 0808 164 3332 or [helpline@sands.org.uk](mailto:helpline@sands.org.uk)

Website: [ands.org.uk](http://ands.org.uk)

Please contact me if there is anything I can do to support you. I'm sure you will join me in sending condolences to [name] and their family.

Warm regards

**Sands supports anyone affected by the death of a baby, works to improve bereavement care and funds research to save babies' lives.**



### **General enquiries**

020 7436 7940  
info@sands.org.uk  
sands.org.uk

### **Postal address**

Sands  
10–18 Union Street  
London  
SE1 1SZ

### **Support**

 0808 164 3332  
 helpline@sands.org.uk

### **Sands Online Community**

 [sands.community](https://sands.community)

### **Local support for you**

 [sands.org.uk/groups](https://sands.org.uk/groups)  
 [sands.org.uk/sandsunited](https://sands.org.uk/sandsunited)



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*All information is correct at the time of going to print: April 2024.*



**Saving babies' lives.  
Supporting bereaved families.**

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