
Child bereavement leave

Guidance

Introduction

From 1 April 2019, new provisions were added to the NHS terms and conditions of service for all staff who suffer a child bereavement. The NHS is an early implementer of the Parental Bereavement (Leave and Pay) Act 2018, and through the NHS Staff Council a number of the statutory elements have been enhanced.

This guidance contains general advice on the new child bereavement entitlements to ensure that employers and managers, through a compassionate and flexible approach, can support a bereaved member of staff.

The new NHS terms and conditions of service provisions can be found in the [new section 23](#).

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Everyone reacts differently to bereavement, and this should be understood and respected by both employers and colleagues. A person's grief is unique to them and can re-emerge, particularly around the time of significant events, such as holidays, birthdays, anniversaries, another loss, or a particularly stressful time. For this reason, the handbook provisions allow for flexibility in how leave is taken.

Compassion and flexibility from employers and managers can ensure that the impact at work is minimised. Entitlement to child bereavement leave in the NHS will apply regardless of the age of child who has died. Special or significant days, such as the inquest, anniversary of the **death**, or **the child's birthday**, can also be particularly difficult times for bereaved parents. Sensitivity around these times, particularly when considering requests for specific days off, will help employees to manage their grief.

For many, grief can lead to anxiety, depression or even post-traumatic stress disorder. This can happen immediately or may take several months to appear. A bereaved parent may have increased periods of sickness absence; therefore, it is good practice to ensure that their bereavement is considered. For some, getting back to work soon after the bereavement may be helpful, for some, it won't. Employers should also consider cultural and religious expectations, for example mourning periods, attending religious rites and practical considerations such as time for travelling to funerals abroad.

Bereavement can impact on concentration, sleep and decision making. An employee who is in work following a bereavement may benefit from temporary adjustments being made, such as a phased return or flexibility with start times. The NHS as an employer is also likely to have staff dealing directly with death or bereavement and managers should ensure that these staff have the extra support they need. Managers should also offer referral to counselling services and/or occupational health.

Bereaved parents do not have to take the two weeks of leave in a continuous block. The employee should agree with their employer the leave they wish to take. Flexible working requests should also be considered to support individual's return to work and any change in family circumstances such as new or different caring responsibilities.

Useful resources:

- NHS Trust Employee Assistance Programmes
- Cruse Bereavement Care. <https://www.cruse.org.uk/>
- Child Bereavement UK. <https://childbereavementuk.org/>
- The Loss Foundation. <https://www.thelossfoundation.org/>
- ACAS [Managing bereavement in the workplace – a good practice guide](#)
- Tommy's – [How to give support after a stillbirth.](#)