



Supporting Bereaved Employees Policy and Procedure

Introduction

West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC) prides itself on being an employer of choice. With an incredibly varied role in delivering the very best for our residents, communities and businesses, our employees are committed and really make a difference. In return we seek to support and empower our employees, to give their best.

We recognise that dealing with a bereavement can be among the biggest challenges of an employee's life. This policy sets out our commitment to supporting staff through their grief by providing bereavement leave, keeping in touch with staff while they are off work, and supporting staff on their return to work.

We acknowledge that every bereavement is different, and grief impacts everyone in different ways. This policy is intended to cater for a wide range of circumstances and the differing impacts that a bereavement can have, while also recognising the needs of the business.

Bereavement Leave

In the event of the death of an immediate family member (other than a child where the employee is eligible for parental bereavement leave), you will be granted sufficient time to attend the funeral which would normally be 1-day or 1/2 day. An additional 3 day's leave will be given if you are responsible for arranging the funeral or to deal with post funeral arrangements. Each case will be viewed sympathetically and the amount of leave granted will depend on the individual's circumstances. The line manager will take into account matters such as the employee's relationship with the deceased, domestic responsibilities and travel requirements.

For the purposes of this policy, an "immediate family member" is defined as a:

- spouse or civil partner
- partner (including same-sex partner)
- parent (including step-parent)
- adult child (i.e., who is aged 18 or over, meaning that the employee is not eligible for parental bereavement leave)
- sibling (including step-sibling)
- grandparent; or
- grandchild.

Where there is a loss of a child, and that child is under 18. This is a legal entitlement for bereaved parents to be absent from work for up to two weeks where their child passes away. We are fully committed to supporting staff coping with the loss of a child by ensuring that bereaved parents can take parental bereavement leave.

Whatever your length of service, you can take parental bereavement leave if you have lost a child (i.e. under the age of 18) and are the:

- parent of a child who has passed away or
- partner of the child's parent, where you live in an enduring family relationship with the child and their parent or
- "parent in fact" of a child who has passed away, which means that, for a continuous period of at least four weeks before the child passed away, they have been living with the child and had "day-to-day responsibility" for the child (but who is not being paid to look after the child).

Individual who is not an Immediate Family Member

We recognise that you may be grieving following the death of an individual who is not an immediate family member, but with whom you nevertheless have a close relationship, for example an aunt, an uncle, a cousin or a close friend.

If this is the case, you can request bereavement leave and it will be up to your line manager, to decide whether to grant bereavement leave and, if so, how much bereavement leave to grant. The decision will depend on the circumstances, taking into account issues such as:

- the closeness of your relationship with the deceased
- your obligations towards the deceased (for example if you are responsible for arranging the deceased's funeral)
- travel required (for example if you need to travel a significant distance to be with relatives) and
- any bereavement requirements in relation to religion, such as an extended period of mourning (with the onus on you to tell your line manager about these requirements).

The employee can be granted up to 3 days' paid bereavement leave.

Support during Bereavement

If you have suffered a bereavement and cannot attend work, you should inform your line manager of what has happened by telephone as soon as reasonably practicable. This will allow us to support you.

You should inform your line manager of what you would like colleagues to know about the situation and of any urgent tasks that other staff can pick up or meetings that need to be cancelled or rearranged.

Following the initial contact, you and your line manager should keep in touch. The level of contact is a matter for agreement between the two of you.

External Support

External sources of help and support for bereaved employees include:

- [Cruse Bereavement Care](#) / [Cruse Bereavement Care Scotland](#), which offers support to bereaved people, for example via a telephone helpline;
- [Child Bereavement UK](#), which offers support to families when a child passes away, for example via a telephone helpline;
- [Age UK](#), which has a website that includes [guidance and support](#) on coping with bereavement;
- [WAY Widowed and Young](#), which specialises in supporting people aged 50 or under whose partner has passed away; and
- [Marie Curie](#), which supports families living with a terminal illness.

Other Types of Leave

Where you have exhausted bereavement leave, or you are not entitled to bereavement leave under this policy you can still apply for annual leave under our holiday policy in the usual way.

Employees who are not entitled to bereavement leave under this policy may be able to take unpaid time off under our separate time off for dependant's policy. Employees can take unpaid time off work to take action necessary "in consequence of" the death of a dependant. However, the right is limited to the death of an employee's spouse, civil partner, child or parent, or someone who lives in the employee's household (not as a lodger, tenant or employee).

If you are taking sickness absence as a result of ill health brought on by a bereavement, our usual sickness absence policy applies. Under the sickness absence policy, you must:

- complete a self-certification form for sickness of seven calendar days or less; and
- provide medical evidence for sickness of more than seven calendar days.

Return to Work

Once you are back at work, you can discuss with your line manager what further support we can provide.

We recognise that a bereaved employee may not be able to return immediately to their full duties or way of working. It sees the value of temporarily adjusting a bereaved employee's duties or phasing the employee back to work when it is appropriate to do so.

We will consider requests to make temporary changes to working arrangements, such as allowing you to work reduced hours; work from home on certain days; or be reassigned to another role (for example away from a customer-facing role).

Depending on the nature of the temporary changes, your line manager may agree to the temporary adjustments informally with you, or you may need to make a formal request for flexible working.

We recognise that some bereavements will result in an employee being permanently unable to return to their full duties or way of working. For example, an employee with children whose partner passes away may have increased childcare responsibilities. Permanent changes that could be requested include moving to part-time working; working from home on certain days; or being reassigned to another role, if such a permanent position is available.

Should we agree to permanent changes that impact on your terms and conditions of employment, you will be asked to agree to a variation of contract.

Health and Safety

A bereavement can result in an employee experiencing lapses in concentration, impaired decision-making, fatigue, and depression or anxiety. If you are concerned about your fitness for work, you should discuss this with your line manager.

We reserve the right to require an employee who is unfit for work to go home on sick leave or to adjust their duties temporarily. It may be appropriate to seek a medical report on the employee or carry out a risk assessment.

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