

How you can help your employee after their child has died



some suggested Do's and Don'ts for employers

Do	Don't
Do recognise that your employee can, if treated empathetically, once again perform a valuable role in your organisation.	Don't think only in the short-term – your employees are one of your biggest assets, so taking good care of them following a major trauma will benefit your business in the long run.
Do be prepared for the employee to be absent for at least 3-4 weeks initially and potentially much longer. You may find it helpful to talk through options such as taking sick leave. Paid compassionate leave and a phased return to work will help.	Don't think that one or two day's compassionate leave will be sufficient for them to recover.
Do take a few minutes to talk to the bereaved parent on their first day back and assure them they have your support. Tell them they can have more time off if they find work too difficult.	Don't ignore their loss after the first conversation. Keep in touch with them from time to time to find out how they are doing and be prepared to make appropriate adjustments to their work pattern.
Do ask them how much they want their colleagues to know about what has happened. Try to provide an atmosphere of acceptance within the workplace.	Don't be judgmental – be empathetic and understanding.
Do reassure your employee that, whilst their world generally has collapsed, they still have a role to play through their work.	Don't expect them to return to being 'their old self' – the trauma of their loss will have changed them for ever.
Do ask them from time to time how they want to be treated by their colleagues. There is a balance between ignoring the death and over-empathy.	Don't think that their emotional state will last forever; they will, with the right support, slowly heal.
Do be brave enough to use the 'D' word and talk about the sad death.	Don't be afraid to talk with them about their loss, particularly if it was a 'socially difficult' death (e.g. suicide or substance abuse).
Do understand that a bereaved parent will find a day's work totally exhausting. Keep in touch with them and suggest working partial days if appropriate. Give them time out when emotions take over.	Don't assume that they will perform to their previous standard in a short space of time.
Do reassure the bereaved parent that other staff will cover their workload. If they feel they are letting you down, they may try to return to work too quickly – in the long run that could be detrimental both to them and the business.	Don't be too 'business-focussed'. Whilst you do have a business to maintain, try to recognise their long-term potential if they are well cared for.
Do signpost to support groups outside the work environment when requested, if possible. Be prepared to offer counselling if it might be appropriate.	Don't assume that everyone grieves in the same way – it is a totally individual process and everyone is different.
Do consider the effect that their role may have on them. If they are dealing with other people's traumas, see if there are ways that the strain can be reduced.	Don't go on appearances. They may look as if they are coping, but underneath they may be feeling desperate and very alone.
Do consider their work environment. If they have to spend a lot of time working alone, every so often try to provide them with company, in a non-intrusive way.	Don't shy away from your own vulnerability; what has happened is every parent's worst nightmare. Try to stand alongside them.

ACAS have published a guide to good practice for employers, which you may also find very helpful:
<http://www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/0/m/Managing-bereavement-in-the-workplace-a-good-practice-guide.pdf>