



Bereavement in the workplace

Supporting a colleague who has experienced baby loss




Sands
Bereavement
in the workplace

W: www.sands.org.uk/BITW

E: corporate.partnerships@sands.org.uk

Registered as a charity in England and Wales (299679) and in Scotland (SC042789)

A company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales number
2212082

It can be difficult to know what to do or say when a colleague has experienced baby loss.

This leaflet seeks to help you understand baby loss, the impact on the workplace and how to support a bereaved colleague.

Sands is here to support anyone affected by pregnancy loss and baby death, including families, friends, colleagues and professionals.

Sands provides support, information and guidance. Contact us if you require support for yourself or assistance when working with a bereaved colleague.

Tel: 0808 164 3332

Email: helpline@sands.org.uk

Sands Bereavement Support Book

www.sands.org.uk/sands-bereavement-support-book

Terminology

Baby Loss is a general term used to describe the various experiences of pregnancy loss and baby death. The term recognises that length of a pregnancy or cause of death does not dictate the depth of grief felt by those affected.

Baby loss includes but is not limited to:

Miscarriage: pregnancy loss before 24 weeks of pregnancy.

Stillbirth: the death of a baby after 24 weeks of completed pregnancy, before or during birth.

Neonatal death: the death of a baby shortly after birth.

Termination For Medical Reasons (TFMR) / Termination of Pregnancy For Fetal Anomaly (ToPFA): when a pregnancy is ended because of a life limiting or life altering medical condition. This can be at any stage of pregnancy, therefore the outcome may be legally defined as a miscarriage or stillbirth, depending on the length of the pregnancy.

What to do

Baby loss can be an isolating and overwhelming experience.

By talking and listening to bereaved colleagues you can help provide an environment at work that is caring and supportive.



Reach out following a bereavement

Lack of contact after a bereavement can be extremely isolating - saying sorry for their loss / saying "sorry for your loss", acknowledging what has happened and reaching out is a better option than saying nothing. Saying nothing can have a negative impact.



Talk to bereaved people

By starting a conversation, you help ease the sense of isolation. Many people are scared they will say the wrong thing but saying nothing has its own impact. A few kind words such as "I'm sorry to hear what happened" or "what was your baby's name?" can go a long way.



Listen compassionately

Some people will want to talk about their baby and about what happened, others will not. Allowing someone the time and space to share what is important to them can bring them comfort. Always be led by the bereaved person and use the words they use.



Don't make assumptions

You cannot assume how a person may feel following the death of a baby, or what they may want or need in the workplace. Ask and listen – do not make decisions on their behalf. Ask them what would help them.

Remember that you can make their experience better by acknowledging what has happened and being ready to talk.

What to say

Finding the right words can be difficult when emotions are running high. Always be aware of individual circumstances, the following phrases are a helpful start.

"I'm so sorry to hear about what happened, I don't know what to say but I wanted to say something"

"You and your family are in my thoughts/prayers"

"I'm sorry to hear about [their baby's name], how are you doing today?"

"I/we are here for you"

"Do what's right for you"

"Take one day, one step at a time"

"Did your baby have a name? I'd like to hear about them if you feel comfortable sharing"



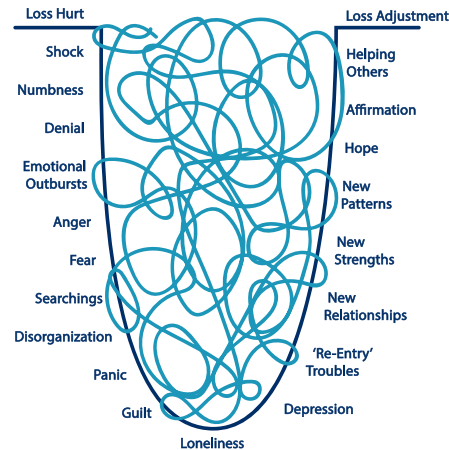
Understanding Grief

Be prepared for any response. There may be tears and silence, this may feel awkward, but this is normal.

Grief is not a linear process, it is often experienced as waves or cycles of distress and continuing with a life that is very different to the one that was expected.

For many people grief is a jumbled mix of emotions and experiences that impact life and work in different ways with no set stages or timeline. Always be patient with grieving colleagues and remember they may be dealing with things you are not aware of.

The reality of grief



*Remain gentle,
kind and understanding.*

Things to keep in mind

1

Many people will consider themselves parents from the time they discover they are, or were, pregnant while others will not. Not all people who have experienced pregnancy loss consider themselves to be, or have been, a parent.

- It is important for those who do see themselves as parents to have this recognised.

2

Bereaved parents feel the same love and pride in their baby as any other new parent.

- Follow the parent's lead. They may want to talk about their baby and share photos or they may not want to talk. Gently ask them and follow their lead.

3

Medical reviews and investigations following baby loss can take several months, sometimes years and can take a toll on individuals whatever the outcome.

- Understanding and time away from work may be required for these appointments.

4

Those who have experienced pregnancy loss or the death of a baby are more likely to need professional psychological support.

- Understanding and time away from work for therapy appointments may be required.

5

Children grieve too. A bereaved colleague may be supporting their other children as they try to understand what has happened, this can take an additional toll on colleagues.

- Understanding these pressures to support their other children may be required.

Things to keep in mind

6

Grief is unpredictable, one minute someone may seem fine and functioning well at work, then the next minute they could be emotional, distracted, and teary.

- This is normal. Kindness, understanding, and patience is all that is needed.

7

Pregnancy after a loss can be a very anxious time for bereaved families, so the usual pregnancy events such as midwife appointments or scans may be not be joyful occasions.

- Understanding and patience is required.

8

Loss of a twin when their sibling survives can be difficult for parents who are grieving the loss of one child at the same time as celebrating the birth of another.

- Remember to acknowledge all their children and follow their lead when it comes to talking about their babies.

9

Milestones such as their baby's birthday/anniversary, Mother's Day, Father's Day, family holidays etc. are often significant for bereaved parents. Grief emotions may arise around these times and many families will arrange something in memory of their baby on these special days.

- Support and understand these events.

10

Those who have experienced baby loss may find it difficult to be around other people who are pregnant, especially in the early weeks and months.

- Be compassionate and supportive if they choose to distance themselves from pregnant colleagues or baby conversations.

Practical ways to support

Talking is not for everyone, you or your colleague may not feel comfortable talking about personal matters. This is normal and there are several practical ways you might want to consider showing your support:

- Fundraising for a charity of their choice is a nice way to show support, you could organise an event in memory of their baby but always make sure your bereaved colleague is comfortable with any plans
- Send a cards/flowers/gift to let them know they have your support, before they return to work
- Offer to walk into work with them on their first day back
- Attend their baby's funeral if invited
- Offer to accompany them to potentially challenging work events or meetings
- Offer to cover any particularly difficult areas of work
- Regularly check in with them, especially if working remotely