

Parental bereavement leave policy template

Every employee who loses a child under 18, or suffers a stillbirth after 24 weeks of pregnancy, has a day-one right to two weeks of parental bereavement leave - it does not matter how long they have worked for you. The two weeks can be taken as one block or as two separate weeks, any time within 56 weeks of the death. Statutory parental bereavement pay needs 26 weeks' continuous employment and average earnings of at least £129 a week, paid at the lower of £194.32 a week or 90% of average weekly earnings (gov.uk). The template below sets that out gently and completely.

What this policy needs to do

This is the one policy in your handbook you hope is never opened. When it is, it will be read by someone in the first hours of the worst period of their life - or by their manager, wondering what they're allowed to offer. So it has two jobs: state the statutory entitlement accurately, and remove every ounce of friction from claiming it. No forms before leave starts, no proof demanded, no manager left guessing whether they can be generous. The statutory scheme is the floor; the policy's tone is what your company will actually be remembered for.

The template

Copy everything from here to the end of clause 10 into your handbook, then replace each [bracketed placeholder]. Before you publish it, have a senior leader read it aloud - if any sentence sounds procedural rather than human, rewrite it.

1. Purpose

This policy explains the support [Company name] gives to an employee whose child dies. Nothing in it can lessen that loss. Its purpose is simpler: to make sure that no bereaved parent here has to negotiate, explain themselves, or think about work at all until they are ready.

2. Who is covered

This policy applies from the first day of employment - there is no service requirement for the leave. It covers the death of a child under 18, and stillbirth after 24 weeks of pregnancy. It applies to parents and to those with parental responsibility, including adoptive parents, intended parents under surrogacy arrangements, and partners of the child's parent [as defined in the statutory scheme].

3. The leave

Employees may take two weeks of parental bereavement leave. It can be taken as a single two-week block, or as two separate weeks, at any time within 56 weeks of the child's death. The long window is deliberate: a second week is often needed much later - around an inquest, an anniversary, or a date that was going to matter.

4. Pay during leave

Statutory parental bereavement pay applies where the employee has at least 26 weeks' continuous employment and average weekly earnings of at least £129, at the lower of £194.32 per week or 90% of average weekly earnings. [Company name] [pays both weeks at full pay for all employees, regardless of length of service / pays the statutory rate]. No one will be asked to discuss pay while arranging the leave; it will simply be sorted.

5. Telling us

A message to [line manager / HR] - from the employee, or from anyone on their behalf - is all that is needed to start the leave. There is no form to complete first and nothing to prove. We will never ask for evidence of the death. [HR] will quietly handle the statutory notice and record-keeping afterwards, and will check what the employee wants colleagues to be told, and by whom, before anything is shared.

6. Beyond the two weeks

The statutory two weeks is a minimum, not a measure of grief. Managers have explicit discretion, with [HR]'s support, to offer more: additional [paid compassionate leave of up to X days / paid or unpaid leave], moving the leave dates, annual leave on request, or sickness absence where the employee's GP advises it. No bereaved parent will be asked to justify needing more time.

7. Coming back

Before the return date, the manager will ask - once, gently - how the employee would like to come back: a phased return, adjusted duties, or a normal first week with the option to step out at any time. The first day back will never include a backlog review or a performance conversation. Grief does not end when leave does, and managers should expect and accommodate hard days long afterwards.

8. Other bereavements

This policy covers the statutory right that applies to the death of a child. For other bereavements, [Company name] offers [compassionate leave arrangements - see [policy/section]], and managers have the same discretion to be generous. The absence of a statutory right is never a reason to offer nothing.

9. Protection and support

No employee will suffer a detriment, or be dismissed, because they took or sought to take parental bereavement leave. Support is available through [EAP / counselling provider], and externally through organisations such as Sands and Child Bereavement UK. [HR contact] is the named person for anything this policy doesn't answer.

10. Review

This policy is owned by [HR / named role] and reviewed [annually], or sooner if statutory rates or rules change. Any change to its tone or promises requires sign-off by [senior leader].

How to adapt it

Lead with compassion; the legal floor is the easy part. Honest guidance on the choices:

- Give managers permission to be human first. The single most valuable clause is 6. Most managers want to offer more than two weeks and are afraid they're not allowed to. Write the discretion down, and no one has to ask a grieving parent to wait while they check.
- Never demand proof. Clause 5 commits you to it. Asking a parent for a death certificate to unlock two weeks' leave is the kind of process decision that ends up in the papers - and deserves to.
- Get senior sign-off on the tone, not just the terms. Have your MD or a founder read the final text aloud before it ships (clause 10 makes this permanent). A bereavement policy that reads like an expenses policy fails at its only job.
- Pay both weeks in full if you possibly can. The statutory rate - the lower of £194.32 or 90% of earnings, only for those with 26 weeks' service - is a floor. Full pay for an event this rare costs a company almost nothing and says everything. Current statutory figures are in our rates guide for 2026-27.
- Honour the 56-week window in spirit. Don't nudge people to "use" their second week early for tidiness. The window exists because grief returns; so should the policy's patience. Acas's guidance alongside gov.uk covers the formal notice mechanics your HR team will handle in the background.
- This template isn't legal advice. The definitions of who counts as a bereaved parent have edge cases (surrogacy, adoption, separated parents); take proper advice if one arises rather than ruling anyone out by handbook.

Running the policy day to day

Operationally, the kindest thing software can do here is stay out of the way: in CoDash, HR can record bereavement leave on someone's behalf so the employee never touches a form, the two weeks can be split across the 56-week window, and the return date quietly prompts the manager to prepare a gentle first day back rather than a surprise. See time off and absence.

A free template from CoDash - codash.co.uk/templates. Edit it to match how your company actually works, and take advice on anything unusual.