



Bereavement Guidelines

It's important to care for our employees. With more work flexibility, employers are turning to alternative ways to stand out as employers of choice. Health benefits are standard, and wellness stipends are increasingly popular. A good bereavement plan is just an extension of those benefits. During a period of grief, your support will make a lasting impression that can alter an employee's experience, with the potential to directly affect retention.

If You Don't Have a Program and Need Somewhere to Start...

First, What Are Your Local Bereavement Laws?

Some countries have bereavement laws that require an employer to offer paid or unpaid time off. In the US, this differs by state. Be clear on what your local laws are, and if you operate in multiple locations, go by the more generous legislation as a minimum. It'll make your life easier in terms of management and is the most equitable for your employees.

Second, How Much Time Will You Give?

Establish how many days will be offered and if/how it will differ by the loss experienced.

How much time off should you offer?

Grief counselors and experts recommend 20 days of leave for close family members. Companies such as Facebook, Google, and Microsoft offer up to 20 days paid leave for immediate family members and some other industry leaders have even extended it to unlimited. Currently, the global average is around 3-7 days of time off (paid or unpaid) depending on the family member.

Immediate vs extended family

Many companies offer additional time off for immediate family members. However, closeness is increasingly more difficult to define, and there is an argument to be made that degree of relation does not dictate kinship.

Some companies are no longer differentiating between immediate family or extended family and offering the same time off for all relatives. This works because:

- It removes any assumption of closeness.
- Bereavement is used not only for mourning, but also for funeral planning and travel. Even if they are not close with the relative, this allows the employee additional time to help their loved ones if needed.

But be sure to consider:

- Additional time off and accommodations for deeply personal losses.



Will all employees be eligible for time off, or only full-time employees? If not, will part-time employees also receive paid time off?

An alternative suggestion is to broaden the category names. You can use "Immediate family, caregiver, or dependent" and leave room for flexibility for nuanced scenarios like domestic partners and stepfamily. When it comes to relationships, you will never be able to fully account for all cases.

Additional Flexible Considerations for Inclusivity

Bereavement policies are constantly changing as employers continue to be more considerate and inclusive of different emotional needs. Here are some additional ways that employers can add to their bereavement policies:

Expand the Included Relationships



- Allow time for roommates.
- Allow time for close friends and chosen family for non-traditional family structures.
- Include pet bereavement.
- Include bereavement for pregnancy loss or miscarriages. This can be viewed as the loss of a child and is especially emotionally and physically difficult for the mother. If you include this, combine it with other medical leaves if needed.

Add Different Types of Leave, Related to Bereavement

- Funeral leave for travel to attend funerals. Not limited to family members or relations.
- Leave for estate or legal responsibilities. Managing the estate or legal matters for a loved one can often extend far past the allocated bereavement leave time.



Allow Flexible Leave

- Allow for intermittent leave so an employee can take the allocated time off as needed.
- A combination of paid and unpaid leave.

Third, What Additional Touchpoints Will You Provide?

Time off is standard, but outside of your formal policy, add touchpoints that will make your employee feel cared for and supported. Here are a few ideas:

Send...

- Care packages.
- Meal kits.
- Flowers for the service.

Collect...

- PTO donations.
- Financial donations for hardships. It's best that the manager does this as it can appear to be inequitable if the People Team does it for some employees, but not all.

When Communicating, Remember...

Make sure employees can locate your bereavement leave policy.

It increases the likelihood that employees will take the much needed time off to the fullest and reduces misconceptions.

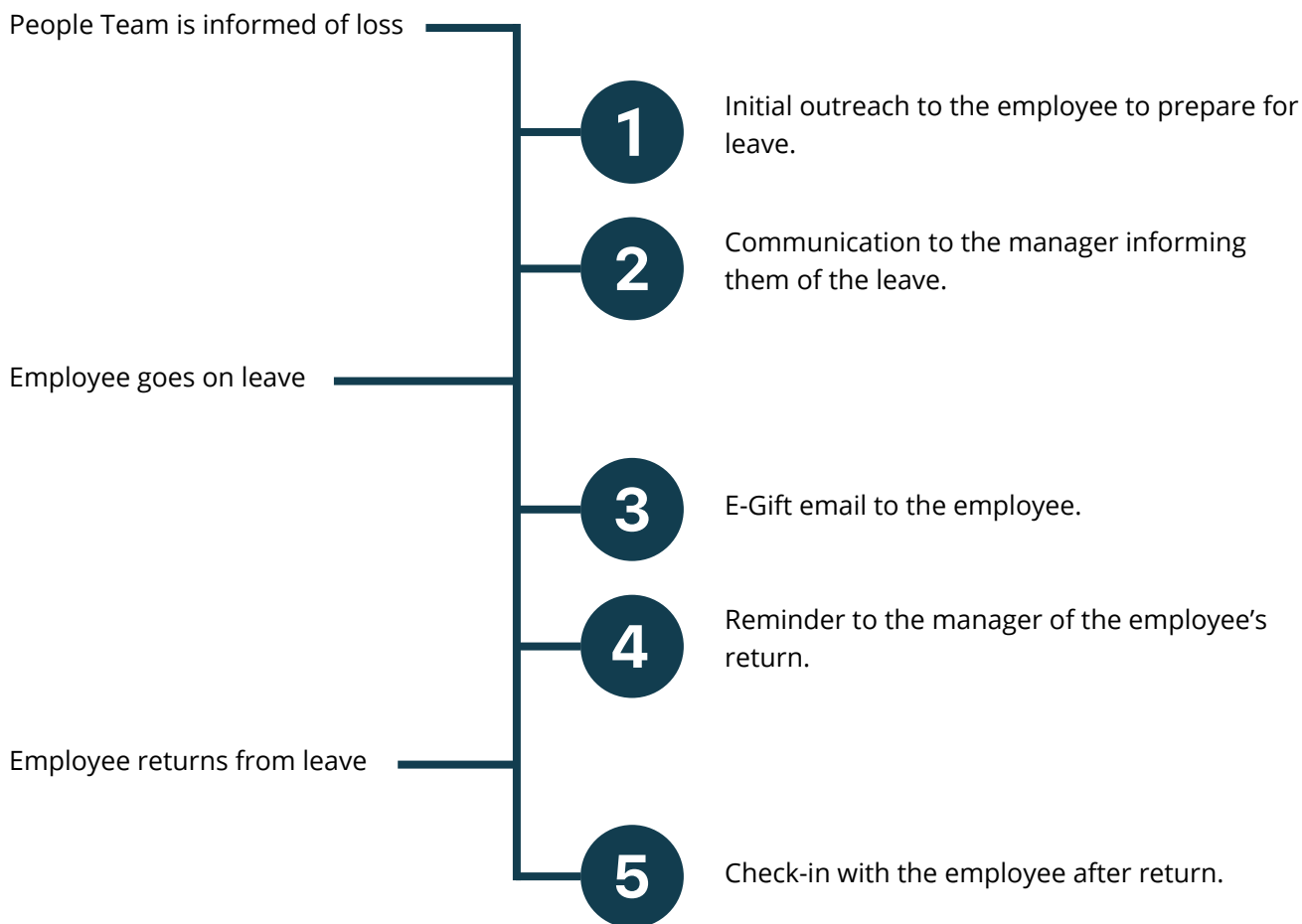
Don't overcommunicate personal details.

Check with the employee first to see how much they are comfortable with you sharing with their manager or team.

Use their personal email when they are out on leave.

Try to send communication to their personal email so they do not have to log into their work email. Or, send it to their work email before the leave and include a reminder to forward the email to their personal emails.

Communication Touchpoints



1. Initial Outreach to the Employee

When you learn of an employee's bereavement leave request, be sure to:

- **Convey condolences.**
- **Ask how they would like to communicate with their manager or team if they haven't already done so.** (The following template assumes the People Team will communicate with the manager.)
 - Ask how much they are comfortable with you sharing. You only need to share that someone is taking time off for a loss.
 - It is likely that the employee has already informed their manager or their manager is the one who reaches out to the People Team. This usually depends on work location (remote, in-person), and the working relationship of the manager and employee.
- **Share resources for the employee.**
 - Include information on the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) and any applicable healthcare information.
 - Depending on the relationship, the employee could need funeral arrangements or estate planning assistance. While you cannot give advice, if you have resources for anything in those areas, it would be extremely helpful.
- **Reiterate the bereavement leave policy so there is no miscommunication.**
 - Offer the possibility of more time off if possible and your company allows.

Initial Outreach to the Employee (Email Template)



When: When you hear of the loss

To: Employee

Subject: We're very sorry for your loss (Bereavement information enclosed)

Dear [Name],

Our/my deepest condolences to you and your family during this difficult time. Losing a loved one is challenging and we are here to help you in any way possible.

If you have not yet communicated your leave with your manager, please let us know if you'd like to keep any details strictly private when we notify them of your leave.

As a reminder, our bereavement policy is [#] days for [relation]. The entire policy can be found here [link]. However, we know that healing and processing grief is different for everyone, so if you need additional time, please tell us and we will gladly work with you and your manager on additional alternatives and time off.

To prepare for your time off, please provide:

- **Your leave dates**, so we can input this into payroll and prepare for your welcome back.
- **Your personal email** so we can send a care package option and you can refrain from logging into your work email.

We cannot imagine what you and your loved ones are going through, but there is support if you need. Please consider our EAP resources [here] [in addition to our mental wellness benefits]. There are also support groups and grief resources [here]. When you return, if you need additional support or accommodations, just let us know.

With sympathy,
[Name]

2. Notification to the Manager

After the employee notifies you of their loss and intended time off, communicate with the manager. It's very likely that the employee has already let their manager know of the loss, but your guidance will be extremely helpful at this time. Include:

- How to communicate sympathy.
- A reminder to not reach out to the employee for any work related issues during the leave. (Though we understand that work distractions are often coping mechanisms.)
- Reshare the resources that you shared with the employee, so they can remind the employee if necessary.
- Gift/support considerations and any stipends or reimbursements the company offers.
- The employee's slated time back and any PTO donation policies if you have it.

Notification to the Manager (Email Template)



When: After sending the initial outreach (give the employee time to reply)

To: Employee's manager

Subject: Notification: Upcoming bereavement leave for team member

Dear [Manager Name],

I have some sad news to share. [Employee] has experienced a loss and will be taking bereavement time off. We know that this is a sensitive and difficult time, so we've provided some talking tips and resources for you as their manager.

To prepare for [Employee]'s leave, make sure any pressing work has someone else who can jump in so you do not need to reach out for any work-related reasons. Please keep in mind that [Name] may not be comfortable sharing their personal details, so be mindful when communicating their time off.

Resources and notes:

- The EAP information can be found [here/link]. We've already provided this to [Employee], but please resend it if you feel they will benefit.
- You can view [some talking tips here](#), because it can be difficult to find the right words (especially when there may not be any right words).
- Refrain from reaching out about anything work-related. This is their time away from the office, and we want to allow them to heal and process.

We will be sending a care package on behalf of the People Team. We'd like to offer you [stipend amount] for an additional sympathy gift. Some ideas are:

- Meal delivery.
- House cleaning services.
- Flowers to the service. **[Optional:** Reserve sending flowers to their home unless you are certain they will be home and enjoy them.]
- Comfort boxes for grief.

We'll be sending you a reminder of [Name]'s first day back with some additional suggestions for work flexibility should they need it. Reach out if you have any questions, or if we can help in any way.

Best,

[Name/Team]

3. E-Gift Notification to Employee

If you choose to send a care package, please make sure that the employee will be home to receive it. It is possible that they will have to travel for the funeral or any additional arrangements. An e-gift from an online vendor that allows the employee to enter the preferred mailing address and gives the employee the option to select their gift is a great option. (We can help with this at ChangeEngine.)



When: Day 1 or 2 after bereavement leave starts

To: Employee

Subject: Checking in (An E-Gift is on its way)

Dear [Name],

How are you doing today? We truly hope that this email finds you and your loved ones well.

We've sent over a gift from [online vendor] to this email, so please be on the lookout if you haven't already received it. Let us know if you don't see it in a few hours (it may have ended up in your spam).

As always, we are here to support you. If we can assist in any way, or if you'll need additional time off, let us know.

With sympathy,
[Name]

If you can't offer additional paid time off, consider unpaid time off or flexible time off.

4. Reminder to Manager of Employee's Return

A day or two before the employee returns, send a reminder to the manager. It should be a simple reminder to check in with the employee, offer them flexible work arrangements if possible, and a nudge to prepare a small welcome back gift/card, and include the resource links one more time.



When: 2 Days before employee's return

To: Manager

Subject: Reminder: Your team member is returning from leave!

Dear [Manager Name],

We want to remind you that [Name] will be returning to work on [Day, Date]. When they return, be sure to check in with them to help manage their workload and wellness. Gauge how they are doing and explore flexible work arrangements or a gradual return to work if needed. If they require a longer term arrangement, let us know.

Below are some tips and reminders:

- Consider a sympathy card from the team or a welcome back gift in preparation.
- If you feel they need it, give them the option of coming to you, so they do not feel pressured to talk.
- The previous resource for talking points can be found [here](#).
- The EAP information can be found [here/link]. (This is for you to take note of if needed. We will be resending the information to [Employee].)

Grief is a deeply personal and unique experience that can be difficult to navigate even as a manager or team mate. Do not hesitate to reach out with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,
[Name/Team]

5. Welcome Back Message to the Employee

Welcome the employee back to the office and check in with how they are doing. This can be a check in after they have returned for a day or two, so they have time to adjust and can let you know if they need anything. Reiterate that you are there to support them and provide the resources again. This should be a short email, letting them approach you at their own pace.



When: 1 or 2 Days after employee return

To: Employee

Subject: We're glad to have you back

Dear [Name],

Welcome back and I truly hope this message finds you well. We are glad to have you back. I wanted to reach out to see how your return to work was going. Are there any accommodations or adjustments that we might help with?

As a gentle reminder, our Employee Assistance Program (EAP) [\[link\]](#) offers counseling services and we encourage you to take advantage of these resources if needed.

We know the healing process takes time and we want your transition back to work to be as smooth as possible. Please feel free to reach out to me or your manager directly if you have any questions or need further support.

Sincerely,
[Name]



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