



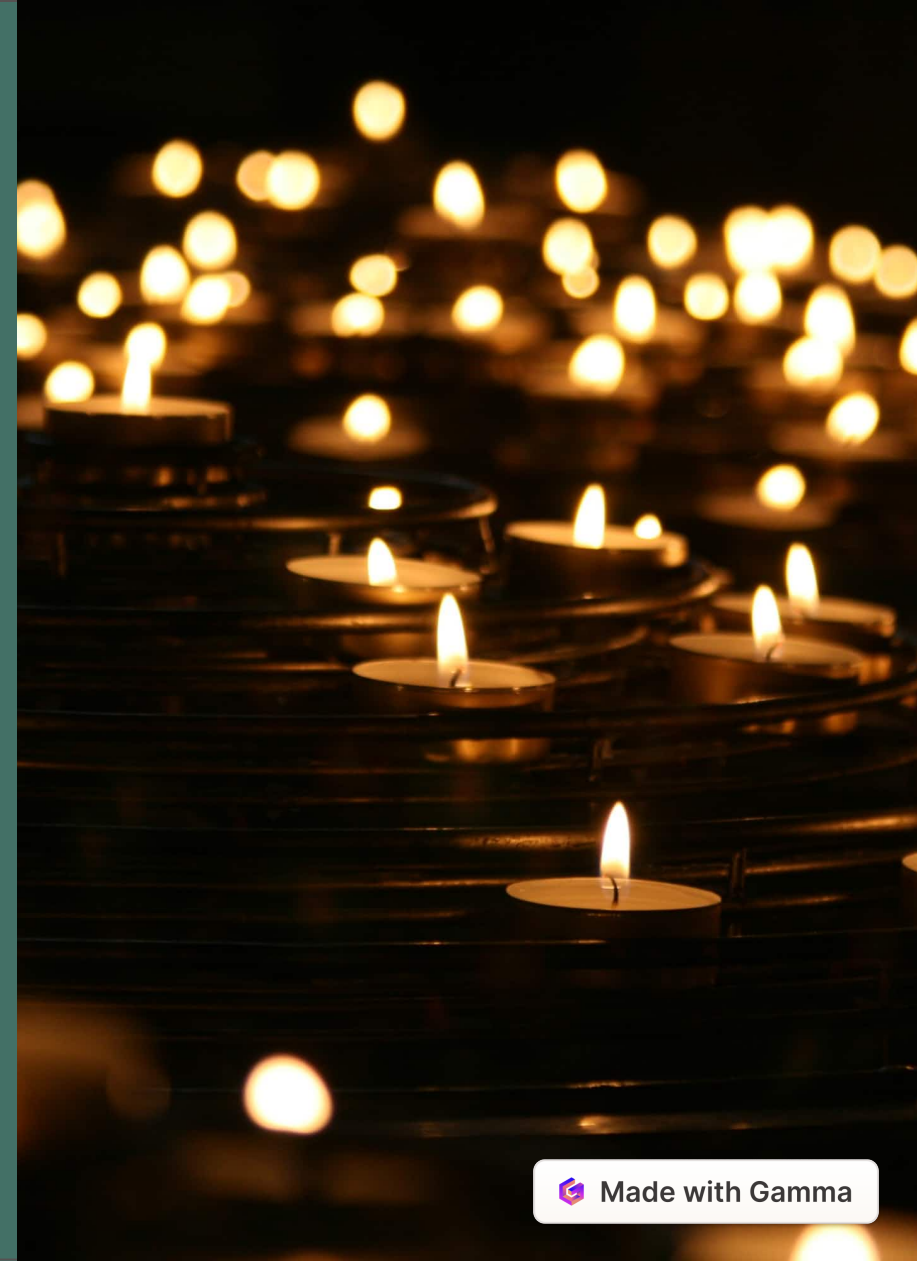
# How to Support Employees Through Grief

In this guide, you'll learn how to effectively support employees who are going through the grieving process. By creating a supportive environment, providing resources, and being empathetic, you can help your team members navigate their grief with dignity and compassion.

**LG** by Lauren Gatenby

# Understanding Grief

Grief is a natural and normal response to loss. It can manifest itself in many different ways, from sadness and anger to guilt and confusion. Everyone's experience with grief is unique, and it's important to understand that there is no "right" way to grieve. By being patient and understanding, you can help someone through this difficult time.



# Stages of Grief

Experts generally accept that we go through 5 stages of grief. Although these are accepted as the most common stages of grief, everyone experiences grief differently. Most people go through all these stages, but will not necessarily move smoothly from one to the next.



# How Does Grief Affect People?

## Emotional Impact

Grief can trigger a wide range of emotions, including sadness, anger, guilt, confusion, loneliness, and even relief. These emotions can fluctuate and vary in intensity over time. People may also experience a sense of emptiness or numbness.

## Physical Effects

Grief can manifest physically, leading to symptoms such as fatigue, loss of appetite or overeating, insomnia or excessive sleep, headaches, muscle tension, and general aches and pains. These physical symptoms may be a result of the body's response to stress and emotional turmoil.

## Cognitive Changes

Grief can affect a person's ability to concentrate, make decisions, or remember things. They may experience confusion, a sense of disorientation, or have difficulty processing information. It is common for grief to temporarily impact cognitive functioning.

## Behavioural Changes

Grief can influence a person's behavior in various ways. Some individuals may withdraw from social interactions and isolate themselves, while others may seek more support and connection with loved ones. People may experience changes in appetite, sleep patterns, or engage in coping mechanisms such as substance use or avoidance behaviors.

## Spiritual and Existential Reflection

Grief often prompts individuals to question the meaning of life, their beliefs, and their own mortality. They may engage in deep introspection, seek spiritual or philosophical solace, or experience a shift in their worldview.

## Relationship Dynamics

Grief can impact relationships with others. Some individuals may draw closer to loved ones for support, while others may find it challenging to connect or communicate their feelings. Grief can sometimes strain relationships or alter the dynamics within families, friendships, or workplaces.

It's important to note that grief is a highly personal experience, and there is no right or wrong way to grieve. The duration and intensity of grief can vary greatly among individuals, and it is essential to allow oneself to navigate the grieving process at their own pace.



Writer and podcaster Nora McNerny shares her hard-earned wisdom about life and death. Her candid approach to something that will, let's face it, affect us all, is as liberating as it is gut-wrenching. Most powerfully, she encourages us to shift how we approach grief.

A really powerful watch.



 YouTube



**We don't "move on" from grief. We move forward with i...**

In a talk that's by turns heartbreaking and hilarious, writer and podcaster Nora McNerny shares her hard-earned wisdom about...

# Communication and Empathy

When supporting an employee through grief, effective communication is key. Listen carefully and be empathetic when they share their feelings. Acknowledge their pain and offer encouragement and support throughout the grieving process. Remember that everyone's experience with grief is unique, so it's important to be patient and understanding.

"Empathy is about creating bonds between people." - Frans de Waal

# Compassionate Leave

Compassionate leave is a type of time off that employers may grant to employees in the event of a bereavement or serious illness of a close family member or dependant. While there is no specific legal entitlement to compassionate leave, many employers have policies in place to provide this benefit. The requirements and provisions for compassionate leave can vary depending on the employer and the specific circumstances.

- 1 Company Policy:** Employers may have a compassionate leave policy that outlines the eligibility criteria, duration of leave, and any supporting documentation required.
- 2 Immediate Notification:** The employee is typically required to notify their employer as soon as possible, preferably before their scheduled work shift, or within a reasonable timeframe, regarding the need for compassionate leave.
- 3 Duration of Leave:** The length of compassionate leave can vary depending on the circumstances and the employer's policy, the average length of time given is five days. Some companies may provide a set number of days, while others may assess each situation on a case-by-case basis. It is essential to refer to your company policy or discuss it with your HR department to determine the duration of leave allowed.
- 4 Pay and Benefits:** Compassionate leave is not a statutory entitlement, so whether it is paid or unpaid depends on the employer's policy. Some employers may provide full pay for a specified number of days, while others may offer partial pay or unpaid leave. The employee should refer to their employment contract or company policy to understand the provisions regarding pay and benefits during compassionate leave.
- 5 Returning to Work:** Employers may have specific requirements for employees returning from compassionate leave. It is advisable to communicate with your employer to discuss any necessary arrangements or adjustments upon their return.

It is important to note that section 57A of the Employment Rights Act 1996 entitles employees to reasonable time off to take the necessary action as a result of the death of a dependent.

# Creating a Supportive Environment

## Open Communication

Encourage open and honest communication so that employees feel comfortable sharing their feelings. Let them know that they're not alone and that you're there for them.

## Flexibility

Be flexible and accommodating when employees need time off or require a modified work schedule. This shows that you value their well-being and understand that grieving is a process.

## Compassion

Show compassionate understanding and make sure that your employees know that you care about their well-being. This creates a safe space where they can express their emotions without fear of judgement.

# Providing Resources and Time Off

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## Employee Assistance Programme

Make sure that employees are aware of any Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) that your company offers. These programs can offer support and additional resources to help them through the grieving process.

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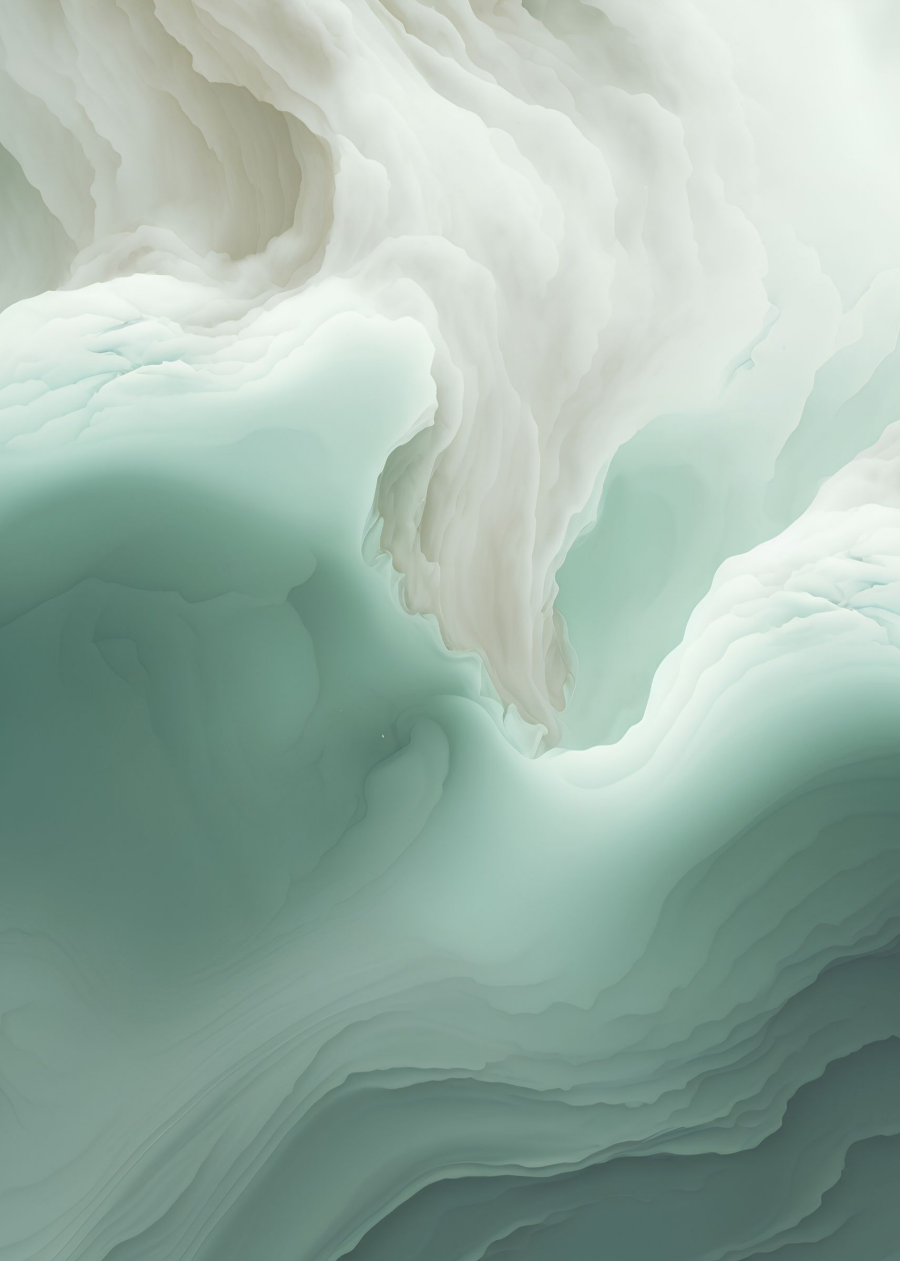
## Flexible Time Off Policies

Offer flexible time off policies to allow grieving employees the time and space they need to take care of themselves and their families.

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## Mental Health Resources

Provide access to mental health resources such as counselling and therapist referrals. These resources can help employees process their grief and move forward in a healthy way.



# Assessing the Need for Professional Help

Sometimes, the grieving process can be overwhelming and may require professional help. You should consider making a referral to your Company's Occupational Health service who will provide guidance on how best to support your employee and will give advice on any reasonable adjustments you could make to support your employee through grief. Keep an eye out for signs that an employee is struggling, such as a lack of productivity or absenteeism. Offer support and guidance, and encourage them to seek professional help if needed. Remember to be patient and compassionate throughout the process.

There are a huge number of professional grief support services, a small selection is listed below.





# Dealing with Loss in the Workplace



## Communicate with Compassion

Inform employees about the passing of their colleague in a sensitive and empathetic manner. Provide clear and accurate information, while respecting the privacy and wishes of the deceased person's family.



## Create a Safe Space for Grief

Recognise that employees may experience a range of emotions and need time to process their grief. Encourage open communication and create a safe and supportive environment where employees can express their feelings and share memories.



## Offer Compassionate Leave

Provide appropriate bereavement leave that allows employees to take time off to attend the funeral or memorial service, grieve, and make necessary arrangements. Ensure that the leave policy is clearly communicated and that employees know their entitlements.



# Grieving and Remote Work

Remote work has become increasingly popular in recent years, but grieving while working at home can be particularly isolating. In this section, we'll explore ways to support employees who are grieving while working remotely, such as offering flexible hours and organising virtual support groups.

## **Offer Flexible Schedules**

Allow employees to have flexible hours of work to deal with daily struggles.

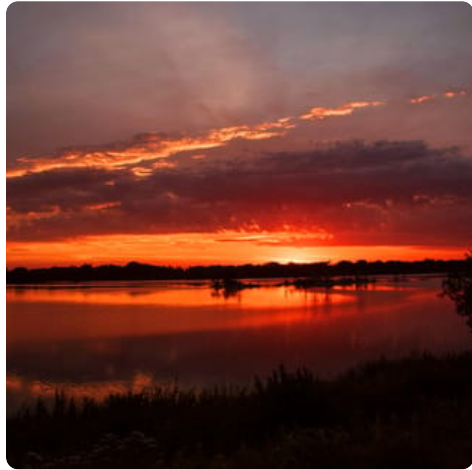
## **Facilitate Open Communication**

Encourage open communication practices that can lead to sharing struggles in a safe environment.

## **Organise Virtual Support Groups**

Facilitate virtual support groups where employees can share their stories and struggles and support each other in the process.

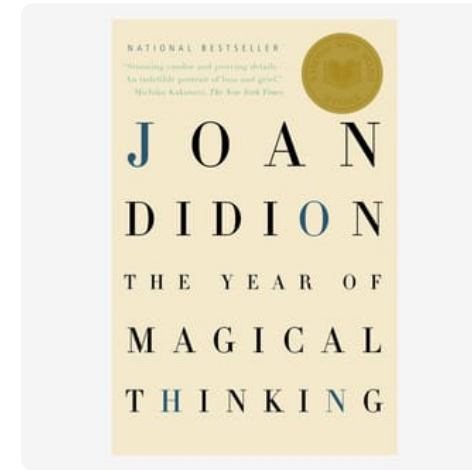
# Further Steps



Encourage employees to take care of themselves and to take time for self-care activities such as walks in nature or meditation.



Offer suggestions for social support, such as joining a grief support group or arranging informal meetings with coworkers.



Provide educational resources such as books, articles or websites that can help employees understand the grief process and offer coping strategies.

Grieving is a difficult and personal process. By being empathetic, providing resources, and creating a supportive environment, you can help your employees navigate this difficult time with dignity and compassion. Remember, grief takes time, and with your guidance and support, employees will be able to move forward in a healthy and positive way.

**If you need assistance to support employees through grief, we can help:**

[Get In Touch](#)