

Sue Ryder Bereavement Leave Polling

Between November and December 2025, we ran a survey asking our supporters and the general public for their views on bereavement leave to inform our response to Department for Business and Trade's '[Make Work Pay: leave for bereavement including pregnancy loss](#)' consultation. We distributed the survey via our social media accounts and our supporter emails and received a total of 174 responses.

Below is a summary of the responses we received and does not necessarily reflect the views of Sue Ryder.

Experiences of bereavement leave

We asked if respondents had ever taken bereavement leave (paid or unpaid).

- 38% said yes, I have taken bereavement leave and always had as much as I have needed.
- 33% said yes, I have taken bereavement leave but not always as much as I have needed.
- 15% said no, I have never taken bereavement leave, but I have needed it.
- 14% said no, I have never taken bereavement leave, but I have never needed it

Qualifying relationships

The Department for Business and Trade's consultation suggested a range of different relationships between the employee and the person who has passed away that could qualify someone for bereavement leave entitlement.

These were:

- immediate family members (including biological, adopted, step, half), for example, spouses, civil partners and partners in a committed long-term relationship, parents, adult children, siblings
- grandparents and grandchildren
- extended family members, for example, in-laws (mother/father/sibling/child), aunts, uncles and cousins, niece/nephew

We asked respondents if there were any relationships not covered above. The following suggestions were provided:

- close friends
- family friends
- step-grandparents
- guardians
- godparents
- mentors
- neighbours
- neighbours that have been caregivers
- carers

- anyone with legal responsibilities following the death such as the executor of the will
- pets
- service animals

Timing and length of bereavement leave

We asked how long after the death should people be permitted to take any bereavement leave:

- 39% said within one year
- 32% said within eight weeks
- 10% said within 56 weeks
- 19% said other

When asked why they chose their selected timeframe, the most dominant theme was that grief does not follow a set timeline.

“Grief hits differently. Setting a time frame on when you are 'allowed' to grieve is impossible. If someone is struggling 2 years later they should be allowed to take bereavement leave - even if already had a small amount off at the time.”

“Grief hits people at different times it doesn't conform to a timeframe.”

Some respondents stated that grief can hit immediately.

“The immediate aftermath of a loved one's death is when most time would be needed.”

“Time is usually needed close to the point of death.”

“The hardest time is after a death.”

Others pointed out that the immediate aftermath is busy and overwhelming. Many respondents emphasised the practical burden immediately after death, such as funeral arrangements, probate, legal and financial administration, clearing property and organising estates, and caring responsibilities for children and surviving relatives.

“Theres loads of things to do immediately as well as the funeral, although the after affects can hit even years later I would have found bereavement leave useful straight away.”

Some noted that stronger feelings of grief may be delayed until after funerals or practical matters are complete.

“The initial period is sometimes just so numbing that there is no real grief. I found that I only started to grieve after the funeral of my wife. Grief also comes in waves and I also found that the worst time was on the anniversary of the funeral.”

"I think 8 weeks is too short, especially if it's the loss of a child or spouse. Often the first 4 weeks are busy with arrangements - death certificates, arranging funeral, solicitors. I think grief really hits once the funeral has been held."

"Bereavement can be delayed because the practicalities of funeral organisations and probate/death administration has to be done first. It's not until sometime afterwards when a bereaved person has time to come to terms with a death that they can finally grieve in their own way."

Respondents described coping initially out of shock, denial, or responsibility for others but breaking down weeks or months later.

"I went into shock after losing my mum and carried on working until I read the coroner's report and my emotions came back full force. I took my doctor prescribed bereavement leave then, which was 3 months after she died. Some people's full grief is delayed."

Others pointed out that grief may re-emerge around anniversaries, birthdays, or 'firsts'; and intensify months or even years later.

"In my experience, all of the firsts are the hardest, so knowing that I would be allowed to take bereavement leave during and after all the firsts of loss and bereavement would be so reassuring and comforting."

The impact of different cultural and religious practices on the grieving period were also mentioned.

"Some religions have different mourning periods and in the Jewish faith there is a stone setting, 11-12 months later."

Some noted that people may feel pressure to return to work too early, which worsened later mental health impacts.

"I think it doesn't always hit people until a bit of time after the death. Some try to go back to work (mostly because they are pressured to!) and actually end up taking time off later down the line."

Some respondents noted concerns from an employer perspective and the need to compromise.

"If it's too long a time frame they will procrastinate. From an employer's point of view they don't want uncertainty for a long period of time. You could start with compassionate leave to start with."

"Bereavement affects different people in different ways, some people cope quite well at first, some people never fully cope. It would depend on how the leave was for, and as a former manager coping without temporary staff would to cover absences causes difficulties to provide services for example in health services."

"8 weeks might be too short but a compromise might be 26 weeks rather than a full year?"

"Whilst I don't think there is a time frame that you can put on your grief journey, I do believe from a business perspective there needs to be a reasonable cap. 1 year anniversaries can hit really hard so going just over that period would help during that time."



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"Grief never goes away, so the time scale could be forever. I think from a work point of view, there has to be a cut off."

Others pointed out the benefit that returning to work can have.

"After sorting out funeral and financial arrangements I feel one should get back into a new routine as soon as possible. Going back to work mixing with colleagues and friends helps the "healing" process."

"I believe 8 weeks is sufficient for bereavement leave. I have lost my mum & mum-in-law in the past few years. A funeral is usually within 4 weeks and then there is admin and sometimes property to deal with. I found returning to work and routine a benefit after the first stage of grieving."

Evidence

The bereavement leave consultation asked a question on evidence so we asked what evidence would be reasonable for an employer to request when someone has asked for bereavement leave.

Views were mixed, but the dominant sentiment was that bereavement should be handled with trust, sensitivity, and flexibility, rather than rigid evidence requirements.

Many believed no evidence should be required, especially where there is an established employer–employee relationship.

"I do not believe evidence should be needed. Employers should know their staff. Should it be a requirement then perhaps an email from the funeral director direct to the employer. Rather than a death certificate which is very emotive."

"That should not be needed. Employers need to trust their staff. When I lost my husband and dad, no one asked for evidence!"

Several responses argued that requiring proof reflects a lack of trust or poor workplace culture.

"If you have to prove that somebody has died, then I think you probably haven't got a very good relationship with your employer or the HR team or your line manager."

Many described requests for evidence as insensitive, intrusive, or inappropriate.

"If you are not being paid then nothing. I could not possibly ask a family member for to give me a copy of the death certificate. That would put a huge strain on them."

"I don't know what evidence you could provide other than the death certificate and that I feel is an awful intrusion on privacy. For some people they may have been living with the person they lost even if it's not a direct relation. A good employer would have line managers who know their staff so for the most part they should know the relationship. I think it would be highly insensitive to ask for a death certificate. I had my Mum and Dads but wouldn't have been happy sharing it with my employer. Any other family member I wouldn't have to ask for a copy which again I feel is very insensitive at that time or any time."



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Some felt that evidence may be more reasonable in large organisations with no personal knowledge of staff.

"This ultimately depends on the size of the company/organisation and how close the employee is with their employer/direct report etc. I think that in a small company then the employer could be very well aware of the loss and not require any further evidence. This is difficult for a large organisation to work out the relationship, as it would be insensitive to ask to see a copy of a death certificate. And it could cause further upset and worry for the bereaved employee."

"I think it would depend on how well the employer knew the staff member, if it is a large organisation it might be necessary to ask for formal notification of death for example a death certificate."

A death certificate was the most commonly mentioned form of evidence, but many noted that it can take weeks or months to obtain (e.g. coroner cases), it may be emotionally distressing to share and employees may not have access if they are not next of kin.

"I guess the obvious answer is a death certificate but having said that, as a manager I have always trusted the staff's word on how they are coping with a bereavement and would have already known in advance if a family member was ill enough to die. For a sudden illness it would feel inappropriate to ask? Sicknote from the GP would be better, as that is usual practice for sickness, which has included bereavement."

Where evidence is considered necessary, respondents suggested less intrusive options, such as:

- GP/doctor's note or fit note
- hospital or funeral director letter
- funeral or death notice/ obituary
- written statement or conversation explaining the relationship and impact
- manager observation and wellbeing check-ins.

"Maybe a GP letter, or something from your grief counselling officer, or the employee, if you know the person, and care about them, give them space to rebuild themselves and their lives."

"This could be a tricky area. Maybe a written statement from the employee confirming their relationship with the deceased, their name, the date of death to be held in a confidential manner."

Many emphasised that the nature and closeness of the relationship (not just legal family ties) and the impact of the loss should guide decisions.

"I think employers should take this as read for immediate family members, but a copy of death certificate or obituary notice should be sufficient for others."

"In the case of a person's child, spouse or live-in partner, a death certificate would not be unreasonable. Perhaps this too regarding wider family. For other categories I'm at a loss. I know I wouldn't feel comfortable asking for a death certificate of anyone less closely connected to me."

A few did raise the need for evidence to prevent misuse.

“This is a tricky one, but I do think providing some kind of evidence would be needed to stop people taking advantage.”

Supporting employers

We asked how respondents think employers could be supported to introduce bereavement leave. The following key themes were identified.

1. Financial support for employers

Many respondents emphasised that employers, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), would need government financial assistance to make bereavement leave viable. Suggestions included wage subsidies, reimbursement of salary costs, tax or National Insurance relief, and funding for temporary or agency staff to cover absences.

“Financial help from the government, employers would have to cover absent staff.”

“Supported financially in perhaps employing temporary cover.”

Some suggestions for financial support were specifically in the context of bereavement leave being paid.

“If the bereavement leave was to be paid leave, then I think the Government should financially compensate the employer.”

2. Training, education and awareness

A large number of responses called for mandatory training for managers and HR teams on grief and bereavement. This included understanding the psychological impact of loss, recognising that grief is non-linear, knowing what (and what not) to say, and responding with empathy rather than assumptions. Several suggested nationally standardised or government-backed training, online learning, awareness campaigns, or designated bereavement/grief officers.

“Training for companies to understand the impact of caring, losing, and recovering from grief.”

“Provide guidance/training about bereavement and the short and long term impact it can have. Help to create a culture of compassionate understanding.”

“Many organisations e.g. banks have a bereavement team or designated persons. Some have an employer’s option. A government helpline for employers to use would be helpful. Training videos/information on how to speak to bereaved employees.”

3. Clear guidance, consistency and legislation

Respondents repeatedly asked for clear, standardised government guidance on entitlement, eligibility, timeframes, proof requirements, and interaction with other leave (e.g. maternity/adoption). Consistency across sectors and employer sizes was seen as important, alongside template policies, legal clarity, and protection for employers from unintended liabilities.



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“Government guidance on how to implement the leave and clarity as to what information and action can be required.”

“Bereavement isn't a 'one size fits all' matter. However, bereavement leave policies and guidance to employees is clear, accessible and available at the point of appointment, then it's already been introduced at a less stressful and difficult time - and that should go some way dealing with the issue at the time such policies are needed.”

4. Flexibility and individualised approaches

Many stressed that bereavement is not “one size fits all”. Suggested approaches included flexible working hours, working from home, reduced hours, phased returns, the ability to take leave in blocks or odd days, and choice over when leave is taken. Flexibility before and after a death (e.g. during terminal illness or sudden loss) was also highlighted.

“People are so different in their support needs from some wanting the distraction of work in weeks whilst others may never return.”

“More flexibility - before my mum passed there were a lot of occasions I had to leave work and head to the home or hospital if she had a fall and was distressed. It was difficult getting that time off. Also, the day my mum passed away I was asked if I wanted to take that day as leave, so definitely more flexibility to be able to respond if you have no other support nearby.”

5. Paid leave and job security for employees

There was strong support for paid bereavement leave, with respondents noting that unpaid leave forces people back to work too soon and worsens distress. Job security, protection from disciplinary action, and avoiding use of annual leave were key concerns.

“Up to 8 weeks, depending on relationship with the person who has died, that period of time should be paid by the employer. No one knows when a death in the family can happen and their suffering enough without the added worry of paying bills etc.”

“Better staff training, reasonable adjustments, empathy, wellbeing support, privacy to grieve, managers understanding bereavement, the law updating, paid leave is essential.”

“Paid leave for people on lower income, If you have a funeral to pay for and you are on unpaid leave this can cause added distress.”

6. Emotional, mental health and counselling support

Many respondents highlighted the need for counselling, mental health support, workplace check-ins, and compassionate cultures. Suggestions included access to trained counsellors, bereavement teams, wellbeing initiatives, regular check-ins, and time off for counselling appointments.

“Official communications and perhaps encourage employers to add bereavement support into any Mental Health initiatives/support they have.”



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"Consult with bereavement counsellors, charities and others involved in supporting the bereaved. Take into account cases where it is an unexpected/sudden death in difficult circumstances. Make sure that those who lose an adult child are included as frequently it often only includes children under 18."

"Guidance on mental health which is both sensible and substantiated."

"I also think employers should allow time off e.g. early morning or late afternoon so that people can attend counselling sessions which are traditionally limited to 12 weeks in the voluntary sector."

7. Communication and workplace culture

Good communication, empathy, and colleague support were seen as essential. Ideas included clear internal communications, induction briefings, awareness campaigns, posters, helplines, and creating cultures where compassion improves wellbeing, retention, and long-term productivity.

"Again from personal experience, they need to have a true understanding of how grief affects different people in different ways. For me, I would have managed back to work had the management been more supportive and understanding."

8. Minority opposing or sceptical views

A small number felt bereavement leave was unnecessary, could be abused, or that continuing to work is better for some people. Others felt employers already manage this adequately or expressed uncertainty about how support could realistically be implemented.

"Employers have enough to cope with. A small employer finds it very difficult to cover for someone who is away on holiday, sick or on maternity leave. Now bereavement leave?"

"No, because it will be abused and currently employers are under severe financial pressure. Additionally, the work, whatever it is, will fall on others to complete which puts pressure on them. "Leave" and being away from your normal situation isn't necessarily the best for everyone."