

# Supporting a worker who is bereaved



## Tips for supporting someone who is bereaved

While everyone grieves in their own way, it is important to remember that feeling irritable, confused, relieved, bitter, angry or guilty is just as much a part of grieving as feeling sad and lonely.

### Things that are helpful:

- **Express your sympathy** in a simple way. For example "I am sorry to hear about your loss"
- **Don't ignore the person who is bereaved.** It is ok to feel uncomfortable but don't let this stop you from making contact. You can always say "I'm not sure what to say but I would like you to know that I am thinking of you".
- **Keep including the person in activities**—even if they refuse many times. If you continue to include the person they can then make a decision themselves about whether or not they wish to be involved.
- **Check with the person if there is something practical that you could do for them.** For example going for a coffee or a walk or doing some shopping for them.

## What do I do?

### Sensitivity and compassion make a big difference

#### 1. Talk to the person who is bereaved

It is very important to **acknowledge a person's loss.**

However, talking to people who are bereaved may feel a bit daunting. Don't be worried about this:

- It is normal to feel a bit uncomfortable
- Don't let this stop you making contact with the person
- People really appreciate the effort you make to contact them

#### 2. Ask the bereaved person how you can support them

People grieve differently—some people want to talk about their loss while others are more private. It can sometimes be hard to know how best to support a worker who is bereaved.

Remember:

- You don't have to have all the answers
- Ask the person what kind of support would be helpful
- It can be useful to have one or two practical suggestions such as:
  - "Would you like to go for a walk at lunchtime?"
  - "Would you like to meet for a coffee?"

The person may not be able to give you an answer immediately. You can always invite them to have a think about your suggestion and if it does not suit, to come back to you with the type of support that would be helpful for them.

#### 3. Keep in touch

People who are grieving generally do not want to be smothered with attention but neither do they want to be ignored.

It is important to stay in touch with the bereaved person as time goes on (see the leaflet "How does Grief work?") and to reassure her/him of your and the organisation's support.

**Remember—the worker who is bereaved is the expert on their grief.**

# Supporting a worker who is bereaved

What kind of **supports** do people need?  
Bereavement support can be divided into 3 Levels

## The role of the workplace

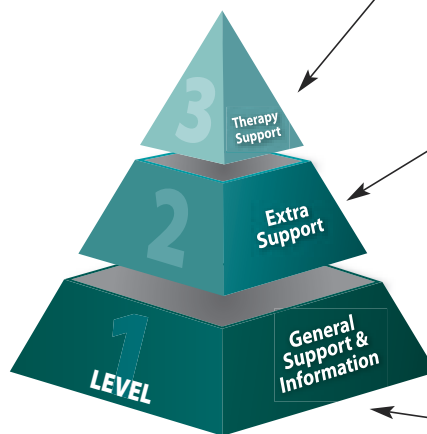
The role of the workplace is to provide **Level 1 Support** to workers who are bereaved, and to have procedures in place to access Level 2 and Level 3 support as required.

### Level 1 Support involves providing:

- **Information** on bereavement and the various supports that are available to the grieving worker (e.g. bereavement leave, compassionate leave, financial supports policies, EAP programs etc.) in the organisation / company
- **Practical help** this can include looking at work load, scheduling and expectations. Most people who are bereaved want to get back to work and really appreciate flexibility in being able to do this
- **Social support** continue to include the bereaved worker in social activities. Even if they refuse many invitations initially, keep asking them, they at least have a choice about whether to respond or not. Often workers are glad to be still included and will respond when they are ready.

## LEVELS OF BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT

Level 1 support is available in the workplace and procedures are in place to access Level 2 and Level 3 support as required.



**Level 3 Therapy Support** is specialised support provided by professionals (psychologists, psychotherapists, counsellors and doctors) and is appropriate for people who develop complications or become stuck in their grieving process (approximately 10-15%)

**Level 2 Extra Support** is a service usually delivered by trained volunteers who have themselves been bereaved. It may also be provided through a hospital or hospice. (Approximately 25% of people who are bereaved require Level 2 support)

**Level 1 General Support** applies to the majority of people who are grieving and involves providing information on the grieving process, practical help with tasks and social support. This is the support that the workplace and colleagues can provide. (Approximately 65% of people who are bereaved require Level 1 support)

## Where can I get more information?

- **Web sites**
  1. [www.bereaved.ie](http://www.bereaved.ie) - provides advice and information for bereaved people, those supporting them and professionals working with them.
  2. [www.icbn.ie](http://www.icbn.ie) - Irish Childhood Bereavement Network—provides information on supporting children who are bereaved
- **Bereavement Booklet**  
[www.citizensinformationboard.ie](http://www.citizensinformationboard.ie) (search under bereavement). This contains practical information on dealing with a death and also contact details of support organisations.
- **Bereavement Information leaflets**  
Family Grief - Understanding Grief - Death of a partner etc.  
Contact: Irish Hospice Foundation (01) 6793188 [www.bereaved.ie](http://www.bereaved.ie)

This document has been developed by the Irish Hospice Foundation in association with ICTU, Ibec, ISME, THE WHEEL, EAPA, CIPD, SFA, HSA, Dept JEI and IMI as part of the Building Bridges Project.

