



Initial communication with a worker who is bereaved

www.bereaved.ie



Tips for communicating with a person who is bereaved

1. Verify the details of the worker's bereavement
2. Establish good communication with the worker or his/her family/representatives as soon as possible after hearing about the news of their bereavement.
3. Offer support immediately, appropriate to the worker's needs and preferences
4. Sensitively enquire about the worker's wishes around funeral arrangements and what information to share with colleagues

What do I say?

1. Convey your support

The first message that bereaved staff members often need to hear is that they must take whatever time they need. Work comes second.

KEY POINTS

Making the initial contact with a bereaved worker is an important first step towards providing support for the individual.

1. **Before** you meet the person check that you have the details correct (who has died and their relationship to the worker).
2. **Acknowledge** what has happened and convey your sympathy for the worker's loss. Something simple like: "I'm very sorry to hear about your father" or "I'm sorry to hear about your sad news", can be helpful.
3. **Ask** if there is something that you can do to help the person – e.g. to arrange transport or call a relative.
4. **Ask** what information the worker wishes to be shared with colleagues and their wishes in relation to attendance at the removal/funeral.
5. **Provide** information on the workers entitlements – preferably in written format with contact details for someone that he/she can talk to in relation to any work matters.

What to say

Don't worry about trying to find the perfect thing to say—the perfect thing would be if the person's loved one had not died—keep it simple e.g. :

- "I'm sorry to hear about Mary" or
- "Tom, I can't find the words to tell you how sorry I am"

More important than the words are your compassion.

What NOT to say

- It is important not to say anything which minimises the loss for the person— e.g:

"I heard your father died—

- "We all have to go sometime" or
- "He was very old"

It is important to respect and honour the person's grief.

Every good conversation starts with listening

2. Be prepared

It is important to know what the bereaved worker's entitlements are and to inform her/him in a sensitive way about these. For example:

- Leave options – paid, unpaid etc
- Support – is there an employee support scheme?
- Flexibility – are there options for flexibility around work place/time if required?



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Remember – **sensitivity** and **compassion** make a big difference to someone 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.

When someone you are working with or care about is bereaved:

- **Express your sympathy** in a simple way. Avoid clichés such as ‘it was for the best’, or ‘life goes on’ as they may give offence. Phrases such as ‘I’m so sorry’ or ‘you are in my thoughts’ are better. There are no words that will take away the pain.
- **Try not to tell them that you know how they feel;** you can never truly know how someone else feels.
- **Your own losses may be triggered** when you talk to a bereaved person, but try not to recount stories of your own, or other people’s losses. It is rarely helpful.
- **Don’t avoid mentioning the person who has died.** Most bereaved people welcome the chance to talk. You do not lessen grief by avoiding the subject.

3. Keep in contact with a bereaved worker

- Best practice suggests that designating one person to liaise directly with the recently bereaved worker ensures continuity and enables a sensitive, person-centered response from the organisation.
- Generally the contact person will be the worker’s line manager but it could be delegated to another person depending on the circumstances.
- The bereaved worker should be given the contact details of this person as soon as possible, preferably in written format.

Sample information to put on a Bereavement Entitlements Leaflet/Booklet

The tone of this leaflet /booklet will ideally be compassionate and factual. It will outline the worker’s entitlements around her/his bereavement. It can include:

1. Contact details for the person that will liaise with the worker around her/his bereavement and anything related to work.
2. Information on leave entitlements. For example how many days paid leave, what options are available for unpaid leave, annual leave or other leave options.
3. Details on flexible work options or policies that may be available to the worker.
4. What supports are available – for example, employee support or assistance programs.

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