

Developing an Inclusive Bereavement Leave Policy

A practical guide to designing a bereavement leave policy that reflects the full spectrum of how people love, grieve, and experience family.

Too often, bereavement policies are built around a narrow definition of family. This can unintentionally cause employees to feel alone during some of the hardest moments of their lives.

This guide includes key considerations for designing a more inclusive bereavement leave policy and a sample policy you can adapt for your organization.

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Bereavement leave is one of the most personal benefits an organization can offer — and one of the most telling. When a policy only recognizes biological or legal family, it signals to employees whose families look different that their grief is less valid. Not out of malice, but because no one stopped to ask: "Does this policy reflect how we truly want to support our people when they lose their loved ones?"

The considerations below and the sample policy on the next page are designed to help you answer that question and build something that works better for your employees.

- 1. Expand who qualifies.** Bereavement leave should extend beyond biological and legal family to include godparents, chosen family, close friends, mentors, and pets. If the relationship was significant to the employee, it deserves recognition.

- 2. Give employees flexibility in defining family.** Rather than prescribing a list of qualifying relationships, consider allowing employees to self-identify who their significant relationships are. Trust goes a long way.

- 3. Extend the time.** Three days is rarely enough to grieve, travel, handle arrangements, and return to full productivity. Best practice is moving toward 2–4 weeks for immediate or significant losses, with additional flexible leave available as needed.

- 4. Account for travel and logistics.** Employees with family across the country or internationally may need additional time simply to get there and back. Build that into the policy rather than forcing employees to use PTO on top of bereavement leave because accounting for different circumstances is exactly what equity work looks like in practice.

- 5. Include mental health support.** Grief doesn't end when bereavement leave does. Consider offering access to an Employee Assistance Program (EAP), grief counseling, or flexible work arrangements in the weeks following a loss.

- 6. Train managers to lead with empathy.** A policy is only as good as the people implementing it. Make sure managers know how to have compassionate conversations about loss and understand how to support employees through grief without making them feel like a burden.

Grief is not a productivity problem. It is a human experience, and how you show up for employees in those moments says everything about your culture and what you really value.

Sample Bereavement Leave Policy

The following is a sample policy. Work with your People and Legal teams before implementing.

[Company Name] recognizes that loss affects everyone differently and that family looks different for everyone. We are committed to supporting employees through bereavement in a way that is human, flexible, and inclusive.

Eligibility

All full-time and part-time employees are eligible for bereavement leave.

Leave Entitlement

- Up to 4 weeks of paid bereavement leave for the loss of a spouse, domestic partner, or child.
- Up to 2 weeks of paid bereavement leave for the loss of a parent, sibling, grandparent, grandchild, godparent, chosen family member, or any individual the employee considers a significant person in their life.
- Up to 1 week of paid bereavement leave for the loss of an extended family member, close friend or pet.
- Additional paid, unpaid leave, or flexible work arrangements may be available in consultation with your manager and People team.

Defining Family

We trust our employees to define what family and significant relationships mean to them. Employees are not required to justify or prove the nature of a relationship to access bereavement leave.

Additional Support

Employees are encouraged to connect with our Employee Assistance Program (EAP) for grief counseling and mental health support. Flexible work arrangements may also be available in the weeks following a loss. Speak with your manager or People Team to discuss what support is available to you.

How to Request Leave

Notify your manager as soon as possible. You are not required to provide documentation of the loss. We ask only that you communicate with your team so coverage can be arranged during your absence. Once you've discussed your needs with your manager and how aligned on the amount of leave you will be taking, please use our HRIS to submit your time off request. This is only for administrative purposes only.

Need Additional Support?

If for any reason you are uncomfortable asking for the time you need, or are not getting the support you need from your manager, we encourage you to reach out to a member of the People team. We are here to help support you during this difficult time.