

# CIPD

Guide  
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# Workplace support for employees experiencing pregnancy or baby loss

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Guide for colleagues to support those  
experiencing pregnancy or baby loss

The CIPD has been championing better work and working lives for over 100 years. It helps organisations thrive by focusing on their people, supporting our economies and societies. It's the professional body for HR, L&D, OD and all people professionals – experts in people, work and change. With almost 160,000 members globally – and a growing community using its research, insights and learning – it gives trusted advice and offers independent thought leadership. It's a leading voice in the call for good work that creates value for everyone.

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## Introduction: purpose of this guide

Unfortunately pregnancy and baby loss is a lot more common than many people think, with an estimated one in four pregnancies in the UK ending in loss during pregnancy or birth. Pregnancy and baby loss covers a huge range of experiences, but it's important to remember that, no matter when a pregnancy or baby is lost, it can be devastating for both parents. It's not just carrying women who may require support; their partner's feelings often get forgotten, and they are very likely to be grieving too. Furthermore, it's important to not assume someone's personal situation or family make-up and offer support to anyone experiencing pregnancy or baby loss, including adoptive parents, foster parents, intended parents and surrogates.

Experiencing pregnancy or baby loss can have a big impact on how someone feels about returning to work, and whether to stay with their employer. This impact can be lessened when they have support and understanding from their employer, their manager and their work colleagues.

This guide is designed to help colleagues support other employees at what is likely to be a very difficult time in their lives.

### What is pregnancy and baby loss?

'Pregnancy or baby loss' can refer to many different types of loss, such as:

- A **miscarriage** is the loss of a baby during the first 24 weeks. Further definitions include an early miscarriage (before 12 weeks) and late miscarriage (after the first 12 weeks of pregnancy, but before 24 weeks).
- An **ectopic pregnancy** happens when a fertilised egg attaches itself somewhere outside the uterus.
- Although very rare, another kind of pregnancy loss is **molar pregnancy**, when a foetus doesn't form properly in the womb. Some people also experience termination for medical reasons.
- A **stillbirth** is when a baby dies before or during labour after 24 completed weeks of pregnancy, and a **neonatal death** is when a baby dies within 28 days after they are born.
- Some people may have the distressing experience of more than one pregnancy or baby loss, including **recurrent miscarriage**. In the UK recurrent miscarriage means having three or more miscarriages in a row, affecting around one in every hundred couples trying for a baby.

Sources: Tommy's and Miscarriage Association.

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# What can you do to help a colleague who has experienced pregnancy or baby loss?

Many people don't know what to say or do when a colleague experiences a loss and bereavement. Some people worry about saying the wrong thing and so say nothing at all, which could feel very isolating for the person who has suffered a loss. Your colleague may or may not want to talk about their situation in detail, but acknowledging that their loss has happened is very important.

Saying 'I'm very sorry for your loss' and asking open questions such as 'how are you?' will help them feel they can talk to you about their situation if they want to.

Everyone's experience of grief will be personal to them, and so responding in a sensitive way is key. The best approach is to take your lead from your colleague – some individuals may not want to discuss their situation, or need some time to talk about it.

### What to say and not to say

#### Comments that could be helpful:

- 'I'm very sorry that you have lost your baby.'
- 'This must be really difficult for you.'
- 'I don't know what to say.'

#### Things not to say:

- 'Don't worry, you're young. You can always have another baby.'
- 'It wasn't meant to be.'
- 'It was probably for the best.'
- 'At least you have other children.'

Although often meant with the best intentions and with the aim of helping the person stay positive, they may be upsetting to hear.

Source: [Miscarriage Association](#).

Certain events could be particularly upsetting for a colleague who has experienced pregnancy or baby loss, such as Mother's Day or Father's Day, pregnancy announcements and baby showers. This doesn't mean that you

or another colleague who is expecting a child can't share the experience and anticipation, but you need to show compassion and sensitivity if you know another team member hasn't been so fortunate.

As a colleague, your role is not to be a counsellor or even someone's best friend. But looking out for your colleagues, being prepared to listen, and showing empathy are part of building a caring and compassionate workplace. Knowing they have the support and understanding of their colleagues can make all the difference to whether someone feels able to cope with their loss and grief. There are useful resources listed below that could be helpful to share with colleagues, as well as any internal wellbeing support available. It's important to respect your colleague's confidentiality if they do share any personal information with you.

Supporting someone who is experiencing a loss can be challenging for you too. If so, check out what wellbeing support is available within your organisation, such as counselling and/or an employee assistance programme. It could be that you feel unable to support a team member who has experienced pregnancy or baby loss. If this is the case, talk to HR or your own manager about the situation. Your wellbeing is just as important as your colleague's.

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# Useful resources

**AtaLoss:** the UK's signposting website for the bereaved. They can help with finding bereavement services and counselling.

**Mind:** Mind provides advice and support to empower anyone experiencing a mental health problem. They campaign to improve services, raise awareness and promote understanding.

**Miscarriage Association:** provides free support and information to anyone affected by miscarriage, ectopic or molar pregnancy, via its helpline, live chat and email services and through in-person and online support groups.

**NHS:** Miscarriage.

**Sands:** Sands is a stillbirth and neonatal death charity in the UK. Sands exists to reduce the number of babies dying and to ensure that anyone affected by the death of a baby receives the best possible care and support for as long as they need it.

**Tommy's:** the UK's largest pregnancy and baby charity, funding research and supporting parents through pregnancy complications, miscarriage, stillbirth and premature birth. Tommy's offers pregnancy and baby loss e-learning modules for people managers and HR toolkits to build support for employees through any pregnancy journey, including those that end in loss. Visit [Tommy's pregnancy and parenting at work hub](#) for more information.



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