



Reproductive Loss Policy and Practice Development Resource Sheet

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Who is this resource sheet for?

Organizations that are considering adding language into bereavement leave policies, or developing new management/HR practices, to support employees who are experiencing reproductive loss.

Why is it important to include pregnancy loss in bereavement leave policies?

Reproductive loss is a relatively common experience that often goes unsupported due to the stigma and silence surrounding it. In addition to grief, reproductive loss can lead to physical and psychological symptoms including psychological trauma, medical complications, and pain as well as an increased risk of developing depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation (Quenby et al., 2021). As a result, employees suffering from reproductive loss may have impaired well-being and work performance (Dimoff et al., 2020).

Reproductive loss definition:

Reproductive loss includes but is not limited to miscarriage, ectopic pregnancy, molar pregnancy, stillbirth, neonatal loss, medical termination, abortion, or failed fertility treatment.

Employees experience reproductive loss and may experience grief when:

- Their own pregnancy ends, or baby dies shortly after birth,
- Their spouse/partner's pregnancy ends, or baby dies shortly after birth,
- A former spouse or partner's pregnancy ends, or baby dies shortly after birth for which the employee would have been the biological parent,
- When the employee would have become the parent of a child born because of a pregnancy due to a surrogacy agreement or if such a child died shortly after birth
- When they would have become the parent through intended adoption of the child from a pregnancy or if such a child died shortly after birth.

A comprehensive reproductive loss leave policy should outline the following:

Leave Options

- Paid: Include all options such as bereavement leave, personal days, sick or vacation days, compassionate leave.
- Unpaid: As above, include all options available (e.g., leave of absence).
- Available federal or provincial leave options should be presented (e.g., EI maternity or sickness leave).
- Consider: With whom should employees consult about taking leave? Will leave options differ for employees who have different types of losses? How will the organization ensure that employees do not experience judgment or discrimination when requesting time off? Will employees be able to access leave without having to disclose information that is "too personal"?

Workplace Accommodations

- With whom should employees consult for concerns about conducting their duties effectively or safely? Will a doctor's note be required for accommodations?
- Accommodations may include facilitated flexible work practices, such as work from home, additional breaks, private workspace, reduced or adjusted working hours, ability to turn camera off while in virtual meetings, reduced or postponed work travel, or working alongside a colleague for support.
- Informal accommodations may also be provided and could include coworkers helping the employee with workload/duties or informal work adjustments offered by a supervisor.

Return to Work Processes

- Returning to work after pregnancy loss can be incredibly difficult for employees.

- How will the return-to-work planning process take place? Who will work with the employee to discuss options such as: when the employee will return, gradual return to work options, or ongoing adjustments to the return-to-work plans as the employees' needs change?

Employee Support

- An important part of support through reproductive loss is recognition and acknowledgement that a significant loss has occurred, and that the employee may be suffering (Gilbert et al., 2021). How will the organization ensure that the loss is recognized, and the employee feels supported? Examples may include sending a care package or flowers and conveying sympathies in sympathy cards, phone calls, emails, or in-person.
- Another important element of employee support is a compassionate, empowering, and healthy work environment characterized by respect, trust, and psychological safety (reduced fear of negative consequences of voicing concerns or problems). Such support may be particularly important for employees who do not disclose their loss at work and whose suffering is invisible or unknown.
- To whom should employees speak (perhaps confidentially) about their concerns at work? Multiple options may be provided given that employees may not always be comfortable discussing with certain individuals (e.g., HR representative, trusted colleague, member of leadership team, supervisor).
- Who will check in with the employee over time to assess their well-being and whether their needs are being met at work and how often will check-ins take place? Such check-ins may provide important emotional support and compassion.
- Employee bereavement support resources should be listed (e.g., EAP program, benefits that cover counseling or mental health services) as well as any employee health supports (e.g., medical services, medical insurance benefits).
- External supports should also be listed in the policy, including where employees can find support outside of the workplace. Options include anonymous healing websites www.miscarriagehurts.com and www.abortionchangesyou.com as well as resource websites www.tommys.org, www.emptycradle.org, www.sands.org.uk, www.starlegacyfoundation.org, www.pregnancyafterlosssupport.org or other local support organizations.
- A plan to create and provide formal and informal supports that are not already in place would be beneficial.

Cultural Diversity

- Different cultures respond to death and pregnancy loss differently. With whom should managers speak about supporting employees from various cultural groups (e.g., ask the employee directly, consult with another employee from their cultural group or with a religious leader of their faith group)?

Communication Plan

- Organizations should develop a communication plan to set expectations with the employees around leave time and the return-to-work process. Who will communicate with the employee on behalf of the organization after the reproductive loss and during the employees' leave about the employees' leave options and their return-to-work process? How will employees' needs be determined to facilitate work accommodation(s)?
- Organizations should develop a communication plan to create awareness of the reproductive loss policy and its implementation to inform employees and managers about the policy. For example, policy information could be incorporated into employee onboarding, presented in meetings, in newsletters, or on the company intranet.

Training

- Managers and HR personnel should receive formal training on the reproductive loss policy to know how to implement the policy compassionately. Such training should emphasize policy details, how to acknowledge and support bereaved employees, and general awareness about reproductive loss and its effects.

More information on developing a policy for reproductive loss can be found here:

<https://www.miscarriageassociation.org.uk/information/miscarriage-and-the-workplace/human-resources-hr-information-and-support/a-miscarriage-policy/>

And here: <https://www.boston.gov/sites/default/files/file/2021/06/Docket%20%230481.pdf>

An example pregnancy and reproductive leave policy can be found here:

Channel 4: <https://assets-corporate.channel4.com/flysystem/s3/2021-04/C4%20Pregnancy%20Loss%20Policy%20April%202021%20-%20Final.pdf>

Other companies offering pregnancy loss leave include Goldman Sachs, Reddit, Pinterest, Bumble, and Google.

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