

# Bereavement Leave



palliative,  
neurological  
and bereavement  
support

## The situation

The need for better support for bereaved people in the workplace has been demonstrated by [research commissioned by Sue Ryder](#) into the impact of bereavement. Workplaces can play a big role in supporting employees through their grief and mitigating its consequences.

However, despite nearly **a quarter** of working-age people (7.9 million) experiencing a bereavement in the last 12 months, many employees often suffer in silence or are poorly supported. Some are even forced back to work without time to grieve, for **fear of losing their job**. This can have longer-term consequences for a person's mental and physical health.

Bereavement can trigger mental health conditions, such as depression, eating disorders, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder. Bereavement has also been linked to an increased likelihood of heart attacks and diabetes, and increased mortality.

The impacts are not only felt by the individual but ripple into the wider economy. The grief experienced by employees who have lost a loved one costs the UK economy nearly **£23bn** a year, and costs HM Treasury nearly **£8bn** a year, through reduced tax revenues and increased use of NHS and social care resources.

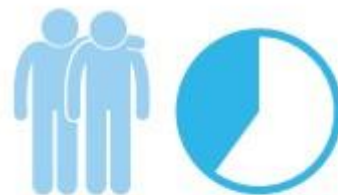
Most of the negative economic impact arises from grieving employees being unable to work at their normal levels of productivity while they deal with the mental, physical, and financial impacts of a bereavement.

While bereavement will remain a fact of life, if just a fraction of the costs associated with bereavement could be mitigated through better support by employers it would provide a considerable boost to the economy.

Typically, UK companies offer 3-5 days compassionate leave for the death of a close relative, but it's entirely at the **discretion of employers**.

One of Sue Ryder's bereavement service users lost her husband to coronavirus earlier this year but was unsupported by her employer:

“ There was certainly pressure to get back to work. They called me every day which was just too much – even on the day of my husband's funeral. It made me feel very under-valued... I had to go through attendance management and there were official letters implying I could be dismissed.”



In a UK-wide survey<sup>2</sup>

**60% of people**

who felt well supported by their employer after experiencing a bereavement cited being allowed enough time-off and not being pressured to return to work when they were not ready as key actions their employer took.

The self-employed and those on zero-hours contracts are especially affected as they usually have **no entitlement** to paid holiday or compassionate leave.

That leaves **almost half of all working people** unable to take leave, without fearing what it would mean for their job security. At a time when an individual is experiencing the immediate grief of someone close dying, they should not have to worry about work.

Sue Ryder's research and anecdotal evidence highlights that the security of knowing that they are being given paid leave, without concerns of how they are being perceived or possibly penalised by employers, can give people the **time and space they need** to come to terms with their loss.

Indeed, in response to the 'Jack's Law' campaign, the government has now given a right to statutory bereavement leave of two weeks for parents if they experience the death of a child under 18.

## What should change

We believe that losing any immediate family member can be deeply devastating and as such, statutory bereavement leave of two weeks should be introduced for all these types of bereavement.

While a **statutory minimum of two weeks bereavement leave** for the loss of an immediate family member is not in itself going to directly help someone grieve and recover from their loss, it would remove a significant burden from the shoulders of all those experiencing a close bereavement. This would particularly benefit people in low-income jobs.

While such a right could incur some short term costs, ultimately it would lead to a **significant saving for the UK economy and the Treasury** through reduced staff absence, higher employee productivity and less reliance on the health and benefits systems post-bereavement.

By bringing in this legislation the government would be taking a significant step in supporting people through the most difficult time of their lives.



Survey evidence supports the case for expanding statutory bereavement leave:

**62% of people**

believe paid leave following the death of a parent, partner, sibling or child should be a week or more.

## Strength of support

The strength of support amongst the public for this change in law is clear, with nearly **50,000** signatures on our [online petition](#) and thousands of emails sent by supporters to their local MP. As more and more MPs publicly backed the cause, it was discussed in a [Westminster Hall debate](#) in relation to employment rights led by Gavin Newlands MP.

Our call has been further advanced in an [Adjournment debate](#) and a [Ten Minute Rule Bill](#) on the issue, both hosted by Patricia Gibson MP, a champion of bereavement leave. In addition, two separate EDMs have been lodged in support, signed by **MPs of all parties**.

Sue Ryder's campaign has gained the backing of a **coalition of MPs and peers of all parties, as well as charities, businesses, faith leaders, and healthcare professionals**, who earlier this year [wrote to the Business Secretary](#), Kwasi Kwarteng MP, calling for a change in policy to provide security for those who are grieving the loss of a close relative or partner, as well as showed their support in [this powerful video](#).

## Next steps

To date the Government has not committed to extending the right to bereavement leave beyond parents of children under the age of 18, however we regard the forthcoming Employment Bill as an opportunity to make this change. The government have now delayed the introduction of this Bill, and so we will work to keep the issue high on the agenda. At this time of national crisis, introducing a more compassionate approach to bereavement leave is paramount.

## How you can support

Sue Ryder is urging MPs of all parties to support its call for introducing statutory paid bereavement leave for the loss of an immediate family member.

You can support our call by:

- Seeking a parliamentary debate to raise awareness of the need for bereavement leave
- Tabling written questions or raising at departmental question time in Parliament
- Writing to the minister to raise your concerns about the lack of entitlement to bereavement leave
- Tweeting your support using the hashtag [#BereavementLeaveForAll](#)
- Initiating a Private Member's Bill seeking to introduce statutory paid bereavement leave for all
- Raising the issue with your parliamentary colleagues and support Sue Ryder's efforts to build parliamentary support.

## Contact

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## About Sue Ryder

Sue Ryder supports people through the most difficult times of their lives. Whether that's a terminal illness, the loss of a loved one or a neurological condition – we're there when it matters. For over 65 years, our doctors, nurses and carers have given people the compassion and expert care they need to help them live the best life they possibly can.