

Be a Voice for Change

An Employee Guide to
Advocating for Bereavement
and Compassionate Leave



Take Action Today

Every day, countless people navigate the roller coaster of emotions that accompany grief. But as they mourn a loss—from a partner to a parent to a pregnancy—few are offered the time and space they need.

That's because our current workplace policies do not reflect the research on, or the realities of, loss and life after.

We deserve to live in a world where people don't have to worry about their shift or a PowerPoint when they're going through the unimaginable. While the experience of loss and hardship can feel disempowering, we want to give you the tools and the research to enable you to advocate for more. In this guide, you will find:

- **Five expert-backed recommendations** to bring to your employer to improve bereavement and compassionate leave policies
- **A prewritten email template** to send to your HR and workplace leaders
- **Key information on workplace leave** so you are better equipped to raise awareness with your HR department or workplace leaders, colleagues, family, and friends.

In honor of Grief Awareness Day, let's enact change together.

"My parents died in a car accident, and my boss gave me three days off. It was not even enough time to finish the funeral. I wanted more leave, and my boss said he understood but there is no way since the company system is like this."

– Addie, Option B 2023 Community Survey

Workplace Recommendations

There are five key recommendations that you can bring to your workplace to start a conversation for change.

Recommendation #1

Workplaces need to expand their current bereavement policies beyond three to five paid days.

Over 60% of U.S. workplaces offer three days or less, but experts note that this is not enough time to cope with grief.¹ Best-in-class companies have up to 20 days paid leave.²



Recommendation #2

Workplaces should consider allowing employees to take leave non-consecutively, not necessarily all at once.

Grief is not one and done right after a loss occurs. It's a non-linear process that comes in waves.³



Recommendation #3

Workplaces should consider expanding bereavement policies to include losses for extended and chosen family members, in addition to immediate family.



Recommendation #4

Workplaces should consider expanding their bereavement policies to include some form of pregnancy loss.

As of February 2023, one in four U.S. companies is offering some amount of bereavement leave for pregnancy loss.⁴



Recommendation #5

In addition to bereavement leave, workplaces may want to consider adopting paid compassionate leave.

Compassionate leave is a catchall category for any life-altering and emergency loss and hardship, like when a close family member is seriously ill or dying or when you need to provide support to a loved one who is caregiving.⁵



Email Template to Advocate for Leave

New Message — ↗ ✕

To: Cc Bcc

Subject: Grief Awareness: What HR and Workplace Leaders Can Do to Help

Dear _____ ,

Every day at our organization, our colleagues navigate the roller coaster of emotions that accompany grief and loss.

In honor of Grief Awareness Day, I wanted to share with you these research-backed resources from [Option B](#) around the value of expanded bereavement and compassionate leave.

One of the best ways to build best-in-class workplaces is by showing up for employees during the hardest moments of their lives. **Top employers realize this and have adopted policies that make it easier for people to mourn and heal after loss, including:**

- Offering employees more than three to five days off after a loss
- Providing flexibility so people can take leave for losses that extend beyond immediate family members
- Allowing employees to take leave non-consecutively, knowing that grief is non-linear and comes in waves
- Providing some type of leave for pregnancy loss

In the [attached HR resource](#), you will find the business case for extended leave, expert-backed policy recommendations, and answers to questions you may receive from other decision-makers within our organization.

With your help, we can enact meaningful change together.

[your name]

[Send](#)

Please note that you can also send this email automatically at www.optionb.org/bereavement-at-work.

Workplace Leave Education

Why should people have more than three to five days of bereavement leave?

- Research shows that there is no one-size-fits-all timeline for grieving and that it can take months for employees to adapt to their new “normal” after loss. While it is likely unrealistic to take that amount of time off work, only having a few days before returning to work is insufficient.⁶
- In the last 10 years, workplaces have started to realize that employees need time off not only to travel to and attend a funeral, but also to emotionally process their loss.⁷

Why is it important to be able to take leave non-consecutively (i.e., not be required to take your leave all at once)?

- Experts stress that leave should be able to be taken non-consecutively to reflect the unpredictability of the mourning and healing process, to honor days like the anniversary of a death or miscarriage, and to complete legal and medical requirements that follow a major loss.⁸

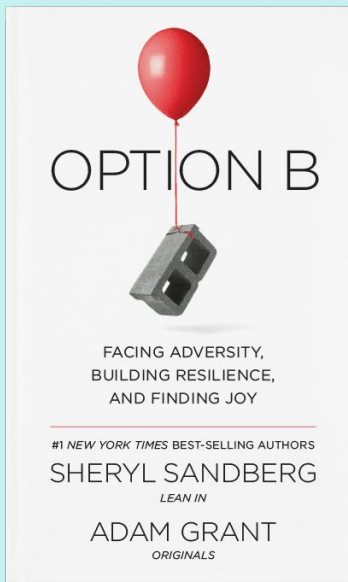
Why include loss beyond immediate family members?

- The best bereavement policies provide flexibility and cover the loss of a range of loved ones, creating space for people to grieve those who are most important to them.⁹

Why should pregnancy loss be included in bereavement policies?

- Almost one in three women develops post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) after pregnancy loss; this is one of the most difficult forms of grief.¹⁰
- Research shows that having time away from work to grieve a pregnancy loss can make a substantial difference for employees by reducing loneliness and isolation and providing time to heal.¹¹

For more information or ways that we can continue to support you, check out www.optionb.org/bereavement-at-work. If you successfully start this conversation at your workplace or have further questions, email us at info@optionb.org.



Who We Are

The work we do at Option B is inspired by former Meta COO Sheryl Sandberg and organizational psychologist Adam Grant. Sheryl and Adam collaborated on the best-selling book *Option B* after Sheryl lost her husband Dave suddenly in 2015.

Their goal was to provide a relatable guide for how to navigate loss and hardship, grounded in a body of research and Sheryl's personal experience. In 2017, Sheryl founded OptionB.Org to provide resources and support for others facing life-changing challenges. In 2022, Option B reached over 18 million people with education and support worldwide.

Endnotes

1. *2023 US Employee Benefits Trend Report*, NFP, 2023.
2. Some companies that have expanded their bereavement leave to 20 days include Liberty Mutual, Goldman Sachs, and Adobe (“Liberty Mutual Insurance Recognized as a Best Workplace for Parents by Great Place to Work,” Liberty Mutual, 2020; “Goldman Sachs Rolls Out New Worker Benefits to Combat Employee Burnout,” *Wall Street Journal*, November 2021; “Bereavement,” Adobe).
3. “Bereavement Leave Is Evolving,” Built In, January 2022.
4. “One in Four US Companies Offers Bereavement Leave for Pregnancy Loss,” Bloomberg, February 2023.
5. “Compassionate Employers Workplace Support,” Hospice UK, 2023; “Compassionate Leave—What It Is and How to Manage It,” Leave Monitor, 2023.
6. Donna M. Wilson, Sehrish Punjani, Qingkang Song, and Gail Low, “A study to understand the impact of bereavement grief in the workplace,” *Journal of Death and Dying*, 2019.
7. “It’s time to rethink corporate bereavement policies,” *Harvard Business Review*, October 2020.
8. “Why it might be time for a more compassionate bereavement policy,” *HR Dive*, September 2021.
9. “Bereavement Leave Is Evolving,” Built In, January 2022.
10. Jessica Farren, Maria Jalmbrant, Nora Falconieri, et al., “Post-traumatic stress, anxiety, and depression following miscarriage and ectopic pregnancy: A multicenter, prospective, cohort study,” *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology*, 2019.
11. “Workers have few job protections during the trauma of a miscarriage,” NPR, January 2022.