

# Bereavement Leave Procedure

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## 1. Introduction

Experiencing the death of a close relative or friend can be one of the most difficult situations an employee will go through and must be handled sensitively by managers and other team members.

Every situation is unique and grief impacts people in different ways. National Highways supports our employees by providing paid bereavement leave to give them time to deal with the necessary arrangements. Keeping in touch and supporting their return to work can be invaluable in helping them to cope with the situation.

The amount of paid leave is set out in the procedure below, although exceptional circumstances will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

This procedure is an extension of the Special Leave Policy and complies with Parental Bereavement Leave Regulations 2020 (parental bereavement leave) and the Statutory Parental Bereavement Pay (General) Regulations 2020.

## 2. Who does this cover?

This procedure applies to everyone who works for National Highways, regardless of their pay band or grade, whether full or part time, fixed term contract or permanent.

### Definitions

employee	an individual who works under a contract of employment with National Highways (including fixed term contracts and those who have transferred into the company under TUPE)
spouse	husband or wife: people who are married in a legally recognised union or in a legally recognised and registered civil partnership
partner	an individual in a long-term relationship but not legally married or in a civil partnership
immediate family member	parent (including stepparent and parent-in-law); sibling (including stepsibling); grandparent, grandchild
other relations	other relations outside of the immediate family, and where a long-term relationship exists, but not necessarily a blood relative, such as a close friend.

### 3.Supporting an employee in relation to bereavement leave

Supporting a team member in relation to the death or serious illness of someone close to them is one of the most sensitive situations that a manager will experience at work. When it occurs, managers should familiarise themselves with the provisions of the [bereavement](#) procedure so they can advise the employee correctly. The HR team can also offer support and they can be contacted on 0300 470 3000 (option 4) or by sending a [query](#) on [HRZone](#).

#### Entitlements

##### Immediate family

In the event of the death of a spouse or partner, the employee will be granted two calendar weeks paid bereavement leave, plus two additional days if they are responsible for arranging the funeral. These can be taken over a 56-week period.

In the event of the death of a child (of any age), or a pregnancy loss at any stage (see pregnancy loss guidance in the family friendly [guidance](#) folder), employees (birth parents and partners) will be granted two calendar weeks paid bereavement leave, plus two additional days if they are arranging the funeral, to be taken within 56 weeks after the child's death. This includes where the employee is the adoptive parent, legal guardian or carer.

In the event of the death of an immediate family member (father, mother, brother, sister, grandparent, stepsibling, parent-in-law, or someone who has acted as a parent) the employee will be granted one calendar week paid bereavement leave, plus two additional days if they are responsible for organising the funeral.

##### Other relations

An employee may be grieving following the death of an individual who is not an immediate family member, and may not be a blood relative, but with whom the employee nevertheless has a close relationship.

They can request bereavement leave and their manager, in consultation with the HR department, will decide whether it is appropriate to grant bereavement leave and, if so, how much. The decision will depend on the circumstances, considering issues such as:

- the closeness of the employee's relationship with the deceased
- the employee's obligations towards the deceased (e.g. if the employee is responsible for arranging the funeral or an executor of the will)
- travel required (e.g. if the employee needs to travel a significant distance to be with relatives)
- any bereavement requirements in relation to religion, such as an extended period of mourning (it is the responsibility on the employee to tell the manager about these requirements).

In these circumstances unpaid bereavement leave of 1-5 days may be granted, depending on the relationship.

## 4. Other types of leave

Where an employee has exhausted their bereavement leave, or does not wish to take bereavement leave, they can still apply for [annual leave](#).

Where bereavement leave does not apply, employees may be able to take [special leave](#) under the separate arrangements for special domestic responsibilities.

Employees can request to take additional unpaid time off work, and managers should consult HR Shared Services before making a decision.

If an employee is taking sickness absence because of ill health brought on by a bereavement, the [Managing Attendance](#) will apply.

## 5. Support available

Where an employee cannot attend work due to the bereavement or serious illness of a close friend or relative, they should inform their manager as soon as reasonably practicable, so they can provide support. If their manager is not available, they should either contact the countersigning manager or HR Shared Services on 0300 470 3000 (option 4) or by raising an HR service [query](#) on [HR Zone](#).

An employee may also experience other symptoms such as lapses in concentration, impaired decision-making, fatigue, and depression or anxiety. If the employee is concerned about their fitness for work, they should discuss this with their manager. National Highways reserves the right to require an employee who is unfit for work to go home on sick leave or to adjust their duties temporarily. It may also be appropriate to seek medical advice through Occupational Health or carry out a risk assessment.

The employee should inform their manager of what they would like colleagues to know about the situation and of any urgent tasks that need to be picked up or meetings that need to be cancelled or rearranged.

Following the initial contact, the employee and the manager should keep in touch, and agree an appropriate level of contact between them.

Bereavement and grief awareness webinars are run by our Employee Assistance Programme on a regular basis. The webinars are recommended for anyone who has experienced a bereavement in the last 12 months to help them in better

understanding bereavement, trauma and grief, and coping. These can be booked on [THRIVE](#).

Bereavement and grief awareness webinars for people managers are also run available on a regular basis. These can help managers support colleagues/prepare to support colleagues with bereavement and grief. These can also be booked on [THRIVE](#).

**Please note in all cases, these are education awareness webinars, not counselling. If your grief is still very 'raw' and that attending either session will be challenging, please contact the EAP helpline on 0800 028 0199 (a/v 24/7, 365 days per year) for individual support and advice.**

Support and advice is also available from the recognised trade unions:

PCS: <https://www.pcs.org.uk/>

Prospect: <https://prospect.org.uk>

**Employee Assistance Programme** see [Employee Support](#)

National Highways provides an employee assistance programme, and advice and counselling is available from Health Assured. The 24/7 helpline contact number for Health Assured is 0800 028 0199 who can provide support on a wide range of work and personal issues. For 24-hour assistance please visit the [Health Hub](#) to access the live chat facility or visit website their [www.healthassuredeap.com](http://www.healthassuredeap.com). The username for the website is **highwaysengland** and the password is **highways1**. A health and well-being app is also available through My Healthy Advantage and can be accessed by registering a work or personal email on a smart device using code: MHA147782.

They provide support to colleagues who are experiencing work or personal problems. This could be the bereaved employee themselves, but also other individuals within the organisation who are affected, including managers or colleagues who are distressed (for example if the situation brings back memories of a bereavement of their own). They can also offer support to the employee's spouse/partner, and to children aged 16-24, who live in the same household and are in full-time education.

Colleagues can access, if they wish, up to six counselling sessions through Health Assured to help them adjust following a bereavement.

National Highways also has a network of [mental health first aiders](#) who are trained in listening and signposting.

They are a useful first point of contact for employees who are experiencing a mental health issue or emotional distress. They can also be approached where there are concerns about a colleague's mental wellbeing.

## External Support

External sources of help and support for bereaved employees include:

- their GP
- [Cruse Bereavement Care](#), which offers support to bereaved people, for example via a telephone help
- [Child Bereavement UK](#), which offers support to families when a child dies, for example via a telephone help
- [Age UK](#), which has a website that includes [guidance and support](#) on coping with bereavement
- [WAY Widowed and Young](#), which specialises in supporting people aged 50 or under whose partner has died
- [Citizens Advice](#) can give advice on bereavement support and benefits.

### Supporting a return to work

Once the employee is ready to return to work, they should discuss with their manager what further support they may require, in advance if possible. We recognise that a bereaved employee may not be able to return immediately to their full duties or ways of working; it may be appropriate to temporarily adjust their duties or to phase their return when it is appropriate to do so.

Requests to make temporary changes to working arrangements will be considered, e.g., reduced hours, or be reassigned to alternative duties (for example away from a customer-facing role). Depending on the nature of the temporary changes, the manager, with advice from HR, may agree the temporary adjustments informally with the employee, or the employee may need to make a formal request for [Flexible Working](#).

We recognise that some bereavements will result in an employee being permanently unable to return to their full duties or way of working, for example, an employee with children whose partner dies may have increased childcare responsibilities. Permanent changes can be requested under [Flexible Working](#), and include moving to part-time working; working from home on certain days; or being considered for another role, if such a permanent position is available (and where the employee has suitable skills and experience). Managers will consider requests for permanent changes, and seek advice from HR.

Where permanent changes are agreed that impact on their terms and conditions of employment, the employee will be asked to agree to a variation of contract.

## 6. Data and Confidentiality

Any personal data collected will be processed in accordance with our data protection policies: [Staff Privacy Notice](#) and [Data Protection Policy](#).

*The bereavement leave procedure is non-contractual and National Highways reserves the right to change this procedure from time to time. We will discuss any changes with the TUS as required, to adhere to business or legislative requirements.*

## 7. Appendices

### Frequently Asked Questions

#### 1. How much bereavement leave can I request?

For the death of a partner/spouse or child, you can take up to 2 calendar weeks.

For the death of an immediate family member (father, mother, brother, sister, stepsibling, grandparent, parent-in-law, or someone who has acted as a parent) you can take up to 1 calendar week.

Managers should ensure the employee is clear on what has been agreed and avoid vague statements such as 'take all the time you need' and discuss other options for taking leave to help support you during this difficult time.

#### 2. How much will I get paid if I take bereavement leave?

Whilst the law is to pay the rate of statutory pay for periods of bereavement leave, National Highways has enhanced the allowances and you will continue to receive your normal pay, including shift pay, for the bereavement leave period.

#### 3. The law says bereavement leave has to be taken in 1 or 2-week blocks - is that correct?

National Highways wants to enable colleagues in these circumstances to take the leave at a time that is most appropriate way to suit their needs. How you take the leave should be discussed and agreed with the manager.

#### 4. How do I politely ask when an employee will return to work after a death in the family?

Offer help, support, and reassurance. Communicate in a way that the bereaved is comfortable with, whether by email or phone. Find out how you

should handle the news in the office, and if the person wants any contact from colleagues. Reassure the employee they will be provided with the appropriate time they need and arrange a follow up call.

**5. What happens if an employee needs more time and has used the 2 weeks?**

In discussion with HR, the manager may agree to a further period to be taken either as annual leave (to be deducted from their annual allowance) or unpaid time off.

**6. An employee has asked for bereavement leave but for the details to be kept confidential – what do I do?**

Under the Data Protection Act 2018, employees have the right to keep their personal details confidential. It is vital for HR and managers to be clear how much detail employees would like their colleagues to know, and ensure their wishes are protected.

**7. Should I keep in touch with an employee on bereavement leave?**

At the time the leave is agreed, discuss what the employee would like to do. It is a good chance to check on their wellbeing and see if we can offer any support. Agree who the contact will be with, how often, and if should be phone, email or face to face.

**8. I am worried about an employee who has had a bereavement and I haven't been able to get in touch with them, what should I do?**

Consider the employee's circumstances – they may not wish to be contacted initially (e.g., a week). If possible, before they go on leave, agree what contact arrangements they would like. If they are close to any colleagues at work, you could also see if they have heard anything. Support is also available from HR if required.

**9. Are the leave entitlements the same if I must travel abroad for the funeral/mourning?**

The entitlement to bereavement leave would be the same. Any additional time can be taken as annual leave, or special leave (unpaid) may be considered in exceptional circumstances, on a case-by-case basis.