

Pregnancy Loss

Supporting Co-op

Colleagues

Guide for Managers

Produced in partnership with
the Miscarriage Association
miscarriageassociation.org.uk



This guide has been put together in partnership with the Miscarriage Association to help line managers support colleagues who have been affected by pregnancy loss.

Sadly, pregnancy loss is much more common than you may think with an estimated 1 in 4 pregnancies ending in miscarriage. As a large employer it's highly likely that we'll unfortunately have many colleagues who are or have been affected at any one time.

The loss of a pregnancy will affect people in different ways. For many people it is the loss of a baby, however early it happens. Thoughtful support and management can make a real difference to how people cope with their loss and can enhance colleague motivation and commitment. A lack of support and understanding may mean colleagues are more likely to be off work for longer and struggle to maintain a positive view of us as an employer.

We know that as a manager it may feel uncomfortable to have conversations with colleagues. You may have been affected yourself, you may be worried about saying or doing the wrong thing, or it could be any of a number of other reasons. This is why we've created this guide, to support you too.

What is pregnancy loss?

- **Miscarriage** - the spontaneous loss of a pregnancy during the first 24 weeks
- **Stillbirth** - the loss of a baby from 24 weeks, during labour or birth
- **Ectopic pregnancy** - when a fertilised egg develops outside the womb
- **Molar pregnancy** - when an abnormal fertilised egg implants in the uterus
- **Neonatal Loss** - the loss of a live-born baby up to 28 days after the birth
- **Embryo transfer Loss** - when an embryo transfer during fertility treatment doesn't result in pregnancy
- **Abortion or termination of pregnancy** - a medical or surgical procedure to end a pregnancy

The law is different depending on when the loss occurs, and the amount of leave a colleague can take changes if the loss was after 24 weeks of pregnancy. Just so it's clear, if you're managing someone who is the pregnant parent and they experience a stillbirth or neonatal loss they are entitled maternity benefits and do not need to use the pregnancy loss policy. You may still find the information in this guide useful though when supporting them through their loss.

Co-op Pregnancy Loss Policy

We have a policy to support all our colleagues affected by pregnancy loss. You can read the policy on our [Co-op Colleague Site](#). Our policy covers paid leave for the parent directly experiencing a loss, as well as partners and parents who experience pregnancy loss through a surrogate.

If you're supporting a colleague who has been affected, you will need to familiarise yourself with the policy as well as reading this guide. The law is different depending on when the loss occurs, and the amount of leave a colleague can take changes if the loss was after 24 weeks of pregnancy.

Any colleague who reads our Pregnancy Loss Policy will be encouraged to speak to their manager. It is important that you feel confident and prepared for any conversation and that is what this guide is for. **Don't underestimate the positive impact that you can have as a line manager when supporting someone with their experience.**

What can I do to support?

There are lots of things that you can do as a manager to make it easier for you and any member of your team if and when they are affected by pregnancy loss. Remember that our Co-op Policy also covers partners – the points below matter just as much when supporting partners as they do for supporting the pregnant parent.

Acknowledge the Loss

It can feel uncomfortable to talk about pregnancy loss in the workplace and with people you may not know well. It is a deeply personal experience. But it's important to acknowledge what has happened and say you're sorry for their loss. Your colleague may be embarrassed, prefer to keep things private or be worried about potential discrimination. Reassure them that the Co-op is committed to supporting them with their experience, however the loss has occurred. At an appropriate point, ask them what they need but be aware that they may not know immediately.

It's important to acknowledge the loss even if it has happened to your colleague before. The Miscarriage Association tells us that people who experience more than one loss tend to get less support each time, but this is often when they need it most. A simple acknowledgement of how difficult this must be will go a long way.

Listen and Respond

As a manager, you're more likely to understand what your colleague needs if you can talk sensitively and listen carefully to what they choose to share. The way you listen and respond will affect how much they tell you and how comfortable they feel about telling you more. Even if you've experienced a loss yourself, their own experience may be very different. The suggestions below may help:

- Ask simple, open questions. Let them explain in their own words. Give them time and be prepared for some silences.
- Don't interrupt or impose your opinions or ideas.
- Show empathy and understanding. Don't make assumptions about what they're experiencing or try and guess how it will affect their work.

- Follow their lead in terms of the language they use to describe their loss. For example, some people say 'pregnancy' whereas others prefer to use 'baby'.
- Offer comfort and support. The most important thing you can do is to acknowledge what has happened. It doesn't have to be anything complicated or profound.

"I'm sorry for your loss."

"I'm here if you ever need to talk."

"This must be really hard, I'm so sorry."

"Please let me know if there is anything you need."

Watchouts

These are some things you might think would help – but usually don't. They tend to be things that try to 'look on the bright side' or start with 'at least'. Most people feel this diminishes the importance of this loss and this baby.

"At least it was early on."

"You can always try again."

"It was probably for the best."

"Everything happens for a reason."

Encourage Conversations

If you're not sure how to start a conversation, use the questions below to get you started.

During and immediately after a loss

"How are you feeling?"

"What other support do you have?"

"What, if anything, would you like colleagues/the team to know?"

"Have you seen the Co-op Pregnancy Loss Policy?"

"How would you like me to keep in touch while you are away?"

"Is there anything you need me to find cover for, so you are not worrying while you are off?"

"What do you feel would help you right now?"

"Do you know how to access the wellbeing support the Co-op offers?"

"Do you need any time off work?"

Respect Confidentiality

Your colleague might not want others in the team to know what has happened. Ask them what, if anything, they would like to share with colleagues. They have a right to keep things private if they choose. Respect their wishes. If you have to tell someone (for example, in the People Function) ask how they would like it to be communicated.

Create a Supportive Environment

One of the most important things that you can do is to be approachable and have the knowledge to respond appropriately and offer the right support for your colleague should they need it. The Pregnancy Loss Policy outlines the support that is available to colleagues from Co-op and also signposts to specialist charities and organisations that can offer support.

It's important to share any relevant information or policies with your colleague. Choose a time when they're not too emotional to take in the information. It might also help to print off the policy and talk it through together.

Make sure they know who else they can talk to, share the details of the Wellbeing Hub with them and let them know they can access Lifeworks, our employee assistance programme, at any time by calling **0800 069 8854**.

It may also help to share the details of other organisations that can help such as the [Miscarriage Association](#). There are details of supporting organisations that can offer support at the end of the Pregnancy Loss Policy. Keep in mind that your colleague may want to access support from an organisation that specialises in the type of loss they have experienced.

Support Time off if needed

Many people, but not all, will need some time off work to recover physically and emotionally. Some will need more time off than others. Our Co-op policy is designed to be flexible enough for managers to respond to individual colleague need. Use your discretion to decide what is right for the individual's situation and circumstance.

As a guide, we would generally recommend giving up to 10 days pregnancy loss paid leave – but some situations may need more, or less. When recording an absence for pregnancy loss please use the pregnancy loss paycode.

Consider the return to work

Returning to work after the loss of a pregnancy may be overwhelming. Your colleague may feel anxious about what colleagues will say or be uncertain about returning to 'normal' life. The loss of a pregnancy isn't always easy to leave in the past, as everyone is different and it can be more challenging for some people. No matter how somebody initially coped with the loss, feelings of grief, anger, jealousy, guilt or sadness can come sometimes without warning, long after the loss itself.

A good starting point for discussing the return to work with your colleague would be to begin with the questions below. Their answers will give you an idea of whether you may need to consider making any reasonable adjustments for their return.

If you think that your colleague will need any reasonable adjustments, it would be good practice to carry out a risk assessment and work together on a Wellbeing Action Plan. You can read more about Wellbeing Action Plans and download a template through our Mental Health Policy

Think about the nature of the work they will be going back to and the impact that and the environment might have on them. For example:

- Do they work with babies or very young children?
- Do they have long shifts alone?
- Do they work with/support or manage people who are in the same stage of pregnancy as they would have been?
- Are they returning to a team where others have come back from maternity leave or are about to?
- Are they likely to be supporting others who are grieving?
- Is there anything you can do to make things easier?

"Is there anything I/we can do to make coming back to work easier for you?"

"What kind of support do you think might help if you become upset or tearful at work?"

"Would you like me to tell/email colleagues about your return? Would you like to draft an email yourself or check what I write?"

"Would you like to meet up before coming back?"

"Is there anything you are worried about?"



What should I do if my colleague experiences a miscarriage at work?

A colleague who begins to miscarry at work may have one or more of these symptoms:

- **bleeding, which may be very heavy**
- **abdominal pain which may be severe**
- **feeling faint and even collapsing (this is most likely with an ectopic pregnancy which can be life-threatening)**

They are likely to be upset, scared and embarrassed. They'll need privacy, support and access to a toilet. They may need something to wrap around themselves if bleeding heavily. They are likely to appreciate a taxi home or to hospital and someone to go with them or to call their partner. If they are very unwell, you may need to call an ambulance.

Reassure them that you will cover any work as needed. Until you know what they want to share, it may help to send a general email to colleagues – for example, 'X has had to leave to deal with an emergency. We will let you know when they will be back at work but, in the meantime, please pass on any work queries to Y'.

Someone who finds out that his or her partner is miscarrying is likely to want to leave work as soon as possible - let them do this.

How pregnancy loss may affect colleagues at work

Everyone is different and pregnancy loss can affect people in lots of ways. However, some common things that people may experience might be:

- Difficulty sleeping
- Finding it difficult to concentrate or to feel motivated
- Struggling with social interaction
- Experiencing mood swings
- Feeling more tearful and/or irritable and or finding it difficult to manage their mental health

Be aware that these feelings may affect your colleague's productivity or ability to manage in a work environment. Keep the lines of communication open so that you can make sure your colleague has the right support in place to help them manage their work alongside their recovery.

If you can't find the right words

Sometimes the biggest difference you can make to support someone is just listening to what they have to say. Sometimes actions rather than words are the best and simplest ways of providing comfort.

You might think it's best to give people space and privacy after a pregnancy loss, but this may leave them feeling isolated. If you're not sure, perhaps you could send a card or a brief text or email just to let them know you're thinking of them and offer to meet if they'd like to.

The difference a manager can make



"When I went back to work I still remember people who said 'I'm sorry, it must be awful, are you okay?' That is all people need to say. It is a bereavement. People mistake it for something different, but you are dealing with the loss of someone who meant the world to you and it needs to be treated with the same level of empathy." – Paul

"I just wanted someone to talk to and listen to me." – Michelle

"My line manager has been amazing. I am so fortunate to have had her support and probably would not be in work now if it wasn't for her."

"I'm returning to work next week and I am really nervous about what my colleagues and the team I manage are going to say and think."

"Not everyone will want to talk about their experiences or feel that they need help. What we want people to know is that if and when they are ready for it, there is always help and support available for all staff."

"My managers knew how to help and it really did make going back to work so much easier."

"People kept asking me how Christine was, but not how I was feeling. It was as if having a baby was a couple thing but having a miscarriage was just for women."



with thanks to the Miscarriage Association

