

3 Ways to Support Members of Your Team Through Death, Dying and Bereavement

A practical guide on how to navigate
death and dying with compassion and
understanding in the workplace

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Serious illness and bereavement are a part of life and yet, in the workplace, we often feel unsure about how to respond. It's estimated that, at any given time, around 1 in 10 UK employees are affected by death and dying. Still, more than 51% of us would be scared of saying the wrong thing to someone who was recently bereaved, including those in management positions.

This guide provides three practical, human-centred ways to support a member of your team who has a life-limiting illness, is caring for someone who is dying, or has recently been bereaved. These are simple actions that could make a meaningful difference in some of life's most difficult moments.

How to Speak to a Team Member Who Is Caring for Someone Close to Them Who Is Dying

When speaking to a team member who is caring for someone who is dying, it's best to approach the conversation with empathy, sensitivity and flexibility.

If they are emotional, or start to cry, don't worry. It's likely not what you've said, but the situation that is causing them to feel sad.

Acknowledge their situation without prying, and offer practical support such as flexible working arrangements or time off.

You might say "I'm so sorry to hear what you're going through". Make space for them to talk to you, but don't push. Be there to listen to whatever they need to say.

Use Their Language

Everyone reacts to challenging situations differently, so let your colleague or team member guide you in the language you use. Speak directly, but with kindness. For example, you might say:

“I’m so sorry to hear that John has died.”

Avoid euphemisms like “lost John”, which may feel vague or distant. Using the person’s name can be grounding and comforting.

After opening the conversation, mirror their language. If they say “passed away” instead of “died”, follow their lead. Your role isn’t to get the words perfect, it’s to show up with genuine compassion and presence.

Offer Ongoing, Thoughtful Support

People don’t just move on after a death and your support shouldn’t stop either.

Follow up intentionally. If you say you’ll check in again, make sure you do. By staying in contact this shows your continued support to your colleague.

You don’t need to offer solutions. Where possible, small and thoughtful adjustments such as flexible hours, a reduced workload or simply time to talk can help ease the return to work.

Consistency and patience matter. Even months later, a kind word or check-in can offer reassurance that they are not forgotten or expected to simply “move on”.

It's okay not to have all the answers

Supporting someone through death, dying and bereavement in the workplace will never be easy, but small actions can make a big difference. As a society, we often avoid conversations around this topic, which only increases the discomfort when these moments inevitably arise at work.

That's why we created the Simple Wisdom at Work workshop. Designed for managers and HR professionals. These sessions equip attendees with practical tools and gentle guidance for navigating conversations around these sensitive discussions and workplace challenges.

By building a more compassionate environment, the workshop helps leaders support their colleagues and make a lasting and positive impact on the people they manage and work alongside.

If you would like to learn more about our Simple Wisdom Workshops, please send us an email at info@annerobsontrust.org.uk or visit our website [here](#).



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