



HR Guide For Suicide Postvention Support In The Workplace

When an individual has lost someone to suicide, they are 80% more likely to drop out of work¹. However, with good postvention support provided in the workplace and an understanding and educated workforce, we can aim to reduce the statistic and offer better support for those who need it.

The tips below can help HR and organisations provide suicide postvention within the workplace to support individuals impacted by suicide.

¹ Source: University College London (2016). 1 in 10 suicide attempt risk among friends and relatives of people who die by suicide.



Give space and time

- Recommend time off for the employee to grieve. People often rush back to work as a distraction, but this can lead to being absent months later through burnout.
- Use managers' discretion when it comes to time off. Everyone's situation and level of impact following a suicide will be different, as well as organisations' policies on leave.
- An employee may have exhausted all compassionate leave and is still not well enough to come back, so in this case the manager and HR need to work together to find a solution.
- Be aware of and compassionate towards anniversaries and celebration dates as these can be really difficult. Remember grief does not have a time frame, therefore anniversaries and celebration dates could still be triggering many years on.

Ask the employee how and if they would like the information to be shared

- Be guided by the employee and their wishes.
- If they wish for their colleagues to be informed, let them know how and when you will be sharing the information.
- If they wish for it to be kept confidential, it's important that they are prepared for queries as to their absence from work and that some people may already know. Help them plan their response so they are not caught off guard.



Check-in regularly and ask how they are

- Checking in with your employee goes a long way. It helps them to feel supported, seen and less isolated. It's one of the most simple things we can do!
- Listen to understand, rather than fix. Grief is not something to try and make go away, it's about helping that individual feel listened to and supported through their journey.
- Think about your language. For example, comments such as “they are at peace now”, although well-intentioned, can be hurtful.
- You don't always have to focus on the loss itself as it can already be very consuming for the bereaved individual. Check in about workload, and whether they need any support inside or outside of work.

Listen to what the employee needs

- Listen to and be guided by what the employee needs to feel supported. Make reasonable adjustments based on their needs, such as flexibility for counselling appointments or deadline extensions.
- Help both the employee and their manager to communicate and find ways for the employee to be comfortable reaching out for support or telling their manager they are having a difficult day.
- Signpost to further postvention support. You cannot force someone to engage in support, but letting them know what is available to them is important.



Work with their manager

- Ensure their manager understands that suicide grief can be complex and has no time frame surrounding it. A general understanding and empathetic attitude can help.
- Help them understand that flexibility is important and every situation will be different, so a one size fits all approach will not work.
- Be aware that their employees' work quality and productivity may be affected and appreciate that this may go on for a period of time.

Share resources with all employees

- Send out company-wide resources on suicide awareness.
- Showcase wellbeing resources in the physical workplace as well as various communication channels within the organisation.
- Remind employees of the wellbeing initiatives available to them.



Encourage self-care in the workplace

- Let the individual who is bereaved know it is okay to feel an array of emotions and it is okay to have bad days (but the importance of communicating those days to their manager so support can be provided).
- Encourage a routine to help structure their day. It is likely to be a different routine to before their loss, so support them in navigating through this.
- Accept limitations. Help the employee to understand that some things may be too difficult to do at times and that their productivity, motivation and quality of work may be affected; but that is okay. Reaffirm flexibility and understanding around this.

HR and managers need to look after themselves too

- It can be really hard supporting someone through a bereavement, especially if you are grieving or have personal experience too. It is important to look after yourself in times like these and make sure you and the managers get the support you may also need.

