

Bereavement Leave Policy

Policy · US · Updated 2026-08-09 · Square brackets are placeholders to replace with your own details.

A bereavement leave policy is the written statement of how much time off employees receive after the death of a family member or other loved one — who counts as covered family, how many days apply, whether the time is paid, and how to ask for it. In the US there is no general federal requirement to provide bereavement leave, which is exactly why a written policy matters: without one, every loss is negotiated case by case, at the worst possible moment for everyone involved.

The days after a death are when an employer's real culture shows. A clear policy takes the negotiation out of the room — the grieving employee knows what they are entitled to without having to ask twice, and the manager knows what to offer without inventing it on the spot. It also protects the company: ad-hoc generosity that quietly varies by who is asking is how a compassionate practice turns into a discrimination complaint.

This template gives you a complete policy: eligibility, covered relationships, leave amounts as placeholders you set, pay during leave, the request process, options for extended time off, and the consistency safeguards that keep case-by-case flexibility fair.

Purpose and scope

This policy sets out the bereavement leave [Your company] provides after the death of a family member or other covered person: how much time, who it covers, whether it is paid, and how to request it. It applies to [all employees / employees who have completed [period] of service], including part-time employees [on a prorated basis].

The intent is simple: nobody should have to negotiate for time to grieve, and no manager should have to improvise an answer. Bereavement leave is provided in addition to PTO — it does not draw down vacation or sick balances.

Leave amounts

- Death of an immediate family member: up to [number] days of [paid] leave per loss.
- Death of an extended family member: up to [number] days of [paid] leave per loss.
- Attending the funeral or memorial service of someone outside the covered list ([coworker, close friend]): up to [number] day(s) of [paid/unpaid] leave at the manager's discretion, applied consistently.
- Leave days may be taken [consecutively / non-consecutively within [period] of the death] — grief and estate logistics rarely fit a single tidy block, and travel for services sometimes comes weeks later.
- Where a death occurs [out of state / abroad] and travel is required, employees may request up to [number] additional [paid/unpaid] days.

Covered relationships

For this policy, immediate family means: [spouse or domestic partner; child, stepchild, or foster child; parent, stepparent, or parent-in-law; sibling; grandparent; grandchild]. Extended family means: [aunt, uncle, niece, nephew, cousin, sibling-in-law].

The list also covers [a member of the employee's household, and relationships equivalent to family regardless of legal or biological tie]. Employees whose loss does not fit these definitions should talk to [HR/name] — the policy names the common cases, and [Your company] would rather hear about the uncommon ones than have someone grieve a person the list forgot. [Optional: [Your company] also provides up to [number] days of leave following a pregnancy loss experienced by the employee or their partner.]

State bereavement leave mandates

A growing set of states now require bereavement leave, and [Your company] complies with the law of every state where it has employees; where a state mandate exceeds this policy, the mandate applies. States with bereavement leave requirements currently include California — where AB 1949 entitles eligible employees of employers with five or more people to up to five days of bereavement leave for a covered family member's death, taken within three months and not necessarily consecutively — as well as Illinois, Oregon, Washington, Maryland, and Vermont, each with its own coverage rules, day counts, and definitions of family. Some also cover pregnancy loss and failed adoptions.

These laws change and differ in the details — which employers are covered, whether leave is paid, and what documentation may be requested. [HR/name/role] checks the current requirements with the labor department of each state where [Your company] operates before finalizing the bracketed day counts above, and never applies a stricter documentation rule than the state allows.

Pay during bereavement leave

Bereavement leave under this policy is paid at the employee's [regular base rate / regular scheduled hours], excluding [overtime, commissions, and premiums]. It is recorded under the bereavement leave code in [payroll system] so it never draws down PTO balances.

For part-time employees, paid days are [prorated to the regular schedule / paid for scheduled hours missed]. For employees paid on [commission/piece rate], bereavement pay is calculated as [method]. Check your state and local rules before finalizing pay treatment — a few jurisdictions regulate bereavement leave directly.

Requesting bereavement leave

1. Tell your manager (or [HR contact], if you prefer) as soon as you reasonably can — a phone call, text, or message through [system] is fine. Nobody is expected to complete forms on the day of a death.
2. Agree on the dates with your manager; if you want to split the days (for example, some now and some for a later service), say so when you ask.
3. Record the leave in [system] as bereavement leave when you are able, or ask your manager to record it for you.
- 4.

[Your company] does not require documentation by default. [If verification is ever needed — for example for extended or repeated leave — acceptable forms include an obituary, a service program, or similar; a death certificate is not required.]

Extended time and additional support

- Employees who need more time than this policy provides may use accrued PTO, request [unpaid personal leave of up to [number] days/weeks], or discuss a [phased or flexible return] with their manager.
- Grief can bring health effects of its own. Leave for an employee's own serious health condition may be available under other policies or laws, including the FMLA where it applies — see the FMLA policy and DOL guidance rather than assuming bereavement rules cover it.
- [If applicable: the employee assistance program at [contact] offers confidential grief counseling at no cost.]
- Managers should lighten the landing on return: a brief welcome-back conversation, a realistic first week, and no expectation that the employee narrates their loss to the team.

Fair application, records, and review

Managers apply this policy consistently: same relationship, same entitlement, regardless of who is asking. Discretionary additions are allowed — and should be logged with [HR/name] so that discretion stays consistent too. Details of a death are shared only with the employee's consent; "personal circumstances" is all a team announcement needs.

Bereavement leave is recorded in [system] and retained with leave records for [period]. This policy is reviewed [frequency, e.g. annually] and whenever state or local law changes. Owner: [name/role]. Next review due: [date].

How to use this template

1. Set the day counts and the paid/unpaid decision first — [3–5] paid days for immediate family is a common starting point, but pick numbers you can honor for everyone.
2. Edit the covered-relationships list to reflect your workforce, and decide now how you will handle losses that fall outside it — the exceptions are where inconsistency creeps in.
3. Check your state and local rules: a small number of jurisdictions require bereavement leave or regulate its terms, and this template assumes only the federal baseline.
4. Brief managers on the two rules that matter: apply it the same for everyone, and never demand paperwork on day one.
5. Publish the policy in the handbook and [system], and mention it during onboarding — a benefit nobody knows about comforts nobody.

Official guidance

- › [DOL — Family and Medical Leave Act \(FMLA\)](#)

- › [DOL — Wage and Hour Division](#)
- › [EEOC — Information for employers](#)

This template is provided in good faith and for general information — it is not legal advice. Adapt it to your organisation and, where your sector carries specific legal requirements, have the finished document reviewed by a qualified adviser. The live version at <https://trainedteam.com/templates/bereavement-leave-policy-us> is kept current; this file is a snapshot.