

***This is a draft version of the workbook
and is subject to further change.
Please do not circulate beyond your
team.***



Compassionate Employers

CHAPTER 2- Supporting teams with compassion

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Introduction

This is a draft version of the workbook and is subject to further change. Please do not circulate beyond your team.

Disclaimer

While great care has been taken to ensure the accuracy of information contained in this publication, it is necessarily of a general nature and neither Hospice UK nor the other contributors can accept any legal responsibility for any errors or omissions that may occur.

The publisher and contributors make no representation, express or implied, with regard to the accuracy of the information contained in this publication. The views expressed in this publication may not necessarily be those of Hospice UK or the other contributors. Specific advice should be sought from professional advisers for specific situations.

Who is this workbook for?

This workbook is a reflective learning resource for managers of staff whose work may bring them into contact with grief, caring responsibilities, emotional labour, distress, death, dying or bereavement. It is designed to support individual reflection and team conversation.

It should be used alongside, not instead of, appropriate management support, supervision, occupational health, Employee Assistance Programme, HR guidance and organisational wellbeing provision.

How do I use this workbook?

This resource is for reflection and learning. It is not a substitute for clinical, psychological, occupational health, HR or emergency support.

Each chapter can be used as a standalone resource, however, the proposed order of chapters is:

- Team resilience
- Supporting teams with compassion
- Leading with vulnerability
- Managerial burnout.

Throughout each chapter there are opportunities for individual reflection and group reflection. See below for some guidance on how these activities should be facilitated:

Individual reflection guidance

- You do not need to answer any questions that feel too personal, unsafe or difficult.
- Pause at any point.
- If this content brings up distress, speak to someone you trust and access your organisation's support routes, such as your manager, supervision, occupational health, Employee Assistance Programme, HR, GP or urgent support if needed.

Group reflection guidance

- Participation is voluntary.
- No one should be expected to disclose personal trauma, bereavement, mental health experiences or private circumstances.
- Confidentiality expectations should be agreed at the start.
- Managers should not use reflective worksheets as performance management evidence.
- Teams should agree what can remain within the group and what may need to be escalated for safety or support.
- A facilitator is identified for more sensitive discussions, especially professional grief and burnout.

Our wider workplace

- Looking after ourselves matters, but wellbeing is not only an individual responsibility.
- Our workplace plays a large role in supporting our wellbeing.
- Workload, staffing, supervision, leadership, culture, psychological safety, fairness and access to support all shape whether people can stay well at work.
- *To access your organisation's support, please contact someone in your organisation for more information - such as your manager or HR team.*

About Compassionate Employers

The Compassionate Employers Programme launched in 2019 to provide organisations with the skills, knowledge, and resources needed to effectively support employees and customers through terminal illness, caring responsibilities, and bereavement.

We envision a world where all employers are equipped to advocate for and support employees and customers through significant life moments. Our programme is built around three key pillars: greater visibility, education, and connection.

If you would like more information about Compassionate Employers, we would love to invite you to book a meeting with our team here: [Compassionate Employers Intro Chat](#)

About Hospice UK

Hospice care eases the physical and emotional pain of death and dying. Letting people focus on living, right until the end. But too many people miss out on this essential care. Hospice UK fights for hospice care for all who need it, for now and forever.

Membership of Hospice UK is open to UK organisations that provide hospice care. Anyone who works or volunteers for a Hospice UK member organisation can access our member-only services and resources. For more information on how to make the most of your Hospice UK membership, see: <https://www.hospiceuk.org/innovation-hub/membership>

Workbook key

	Lightbulb moment: An interesting fact, extra information.
	Individual reflection: An activity for you to complete (participation is optional).
	Group reflection: An activity to do with your team (participation is optional).
	Important note!: Important information.
	See Glossary: Detailed definitions.
	Tool: You can use this reflection/information outside of the workbook.
	Quote/quotation: Relevant quote/quotation.
	Key term: Important definition.
	Reminder to be kind to yourself: This activity may feel challenging or emotional (participation is optional). Please do take care of yourself and take breaks as needed.

Supporting teams with compassion

'Love and compassion are necessities, not luxuries. Without them, humanity cannot survive.'

Dalai Lama XIV, The Art of Happiness¹

In our team's day to day we play a vital role. When life happens, and it will, your team will turn to you. Not just as a manager, but as a support system.

In hospice settings we know what compassion means to people in difficult circumstances. Managing life-limiting or terminal illness, death and bereavement is incredibly challenging in and outside of work. These are experiences our teams may also face while they are working with us.

How we can support our teams in these moments and conversations is essential and the more comfortable they are to share, the easier it is to handle these sensitive matters well.



What we will cover

We will explore how we can best support our teams when they need us most so you can be present and compassionate in those crucial moments.

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Important note! If this content brings up distress, speak to someone you trust and access your organisation's support routes or urgent support if needed.

Definition: What is compassion?

In hospice settings, compassion is key to all of our roles. We are often working closely with people through important and challenging moments in their lives and this includes our teams.

Key term

Compassion is the feeling of empathy that we have for others' pain which motivates us to act to help relieve their suffering².

Compassion differs from *empathy. It goes one step beyond understanding another's perspective and includes action.

In leadership, this looks like actively embedding compassion into our behaviours, and 'there is clear evidence that compassionate leadership results in more engaged and motivated staff with high levels of wellbeing, which in turn results in high-quality care'³.

Key term

Compassionate leadership is about taking the time to build strong, trusting relationships with your people.

It means actively 'listening, understanding, and empathising'³ with them.

Particularly in moments when our team are vulnerable, experiencing challenges or going through difficult life moments, compassion helps people feel 'valued, respected, and cared for'³.

There are many challenges our team may face and each individual, each circumstance may require different support from us as their manager.



See Glossary for further definitions including *empathy.

Difficult life events

When we talk about significant life moments, that can mean a lot of different things to different people.

In our roles as leaders, we may support people through all sorts of transitions, such as job changes, redundancies, divorce, becoming a parent, navigating fertility issues, illness, and more.



Individual reflection: What other examples can you think of?

Diagnosed with an illness

Caring for a loved one

Death of a loved one

Baby loss and miscarriage

Relationship breakdown/divorce

Job changes, redundancies

Death of a pet

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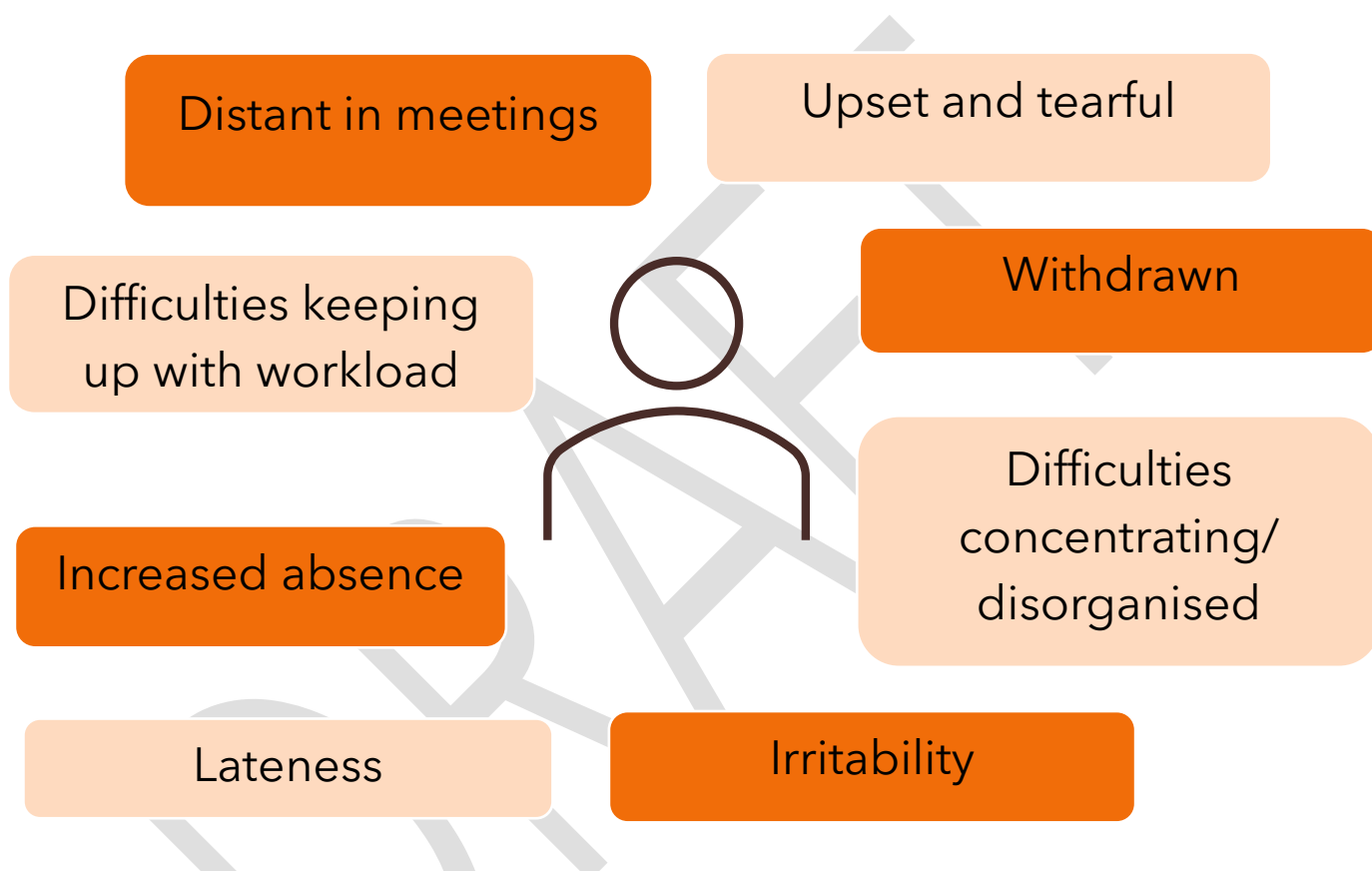
Lightbulb moment: 600 carers a day have to give up paid work to provide unpaid care⁴. 24% of the working population experience a bereavement in a 12-month period⁵.

While statistics are not the whole picture, they can demonstrate how many people in employment are affected - they may be within our teams.

Impact on our teams

Everyone is individual and these life events may impact our teams in different ways. When we know our teams well, we are better able to notice changes in behaviours that may indicate someone may need support.

Some common signs to look out for are:



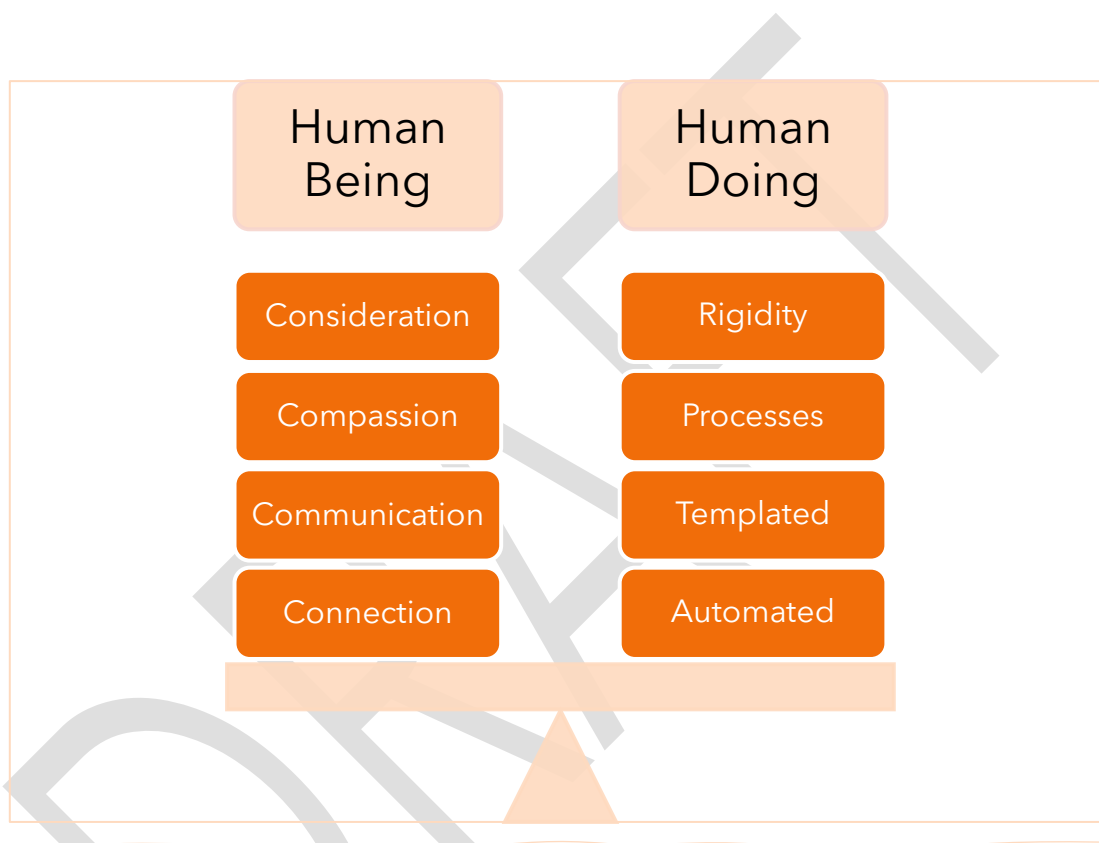
As managers, we need to be mindful that people may not react in the ways we expect. For some people, life events will have a significant impact on them and their work lives while for others they may not. Each person and each situation should be considered individually.

As a manager we have a further responsibility to manage any impact on the rest of the team and the function of the organisation. This requires us to compassionately balance **individual needs** (human being) and **organisational processes** (human doing).

Human being vs human doing

In work we often have to have 'human doing' processes in place. These include policies and procedures and play a role in keeping service delivery consistent and equal across an organisation.

However, it's really important to recognise that in focusing only on these processes, we often lose the 'human being' element of employee support.



Example: A member of our team is on bereavement leave and according to our policy we must check in every few days by phone call. The employee, however, finds the volume of calls overwhelming and ask for email communication. Instead of adjusting to this request or discussing it further (**human being**), we deny it because it isn't in line with policy (**human doing**).

'Human doing' if done without compassion can be hurtful to our employees at a time when they are most vulnerable. We need to find a balance between 'human doing' and 'human being' elements to best support our team and organisational needs.

So how do we get better at this?

Compassionate leadership

When we are supporting colleagues in these vulnerable moments and conversations we can look to embed compassionate leadership in three ways:



1. Preparing ahead of time

How well do we know the 'human doing' processes?

- Organisation guidance
- Relevant legislation



2. Compassion in the moment

How do we show up in the moment involving the 'human being' element of employee support?

- Compassionate leadership principles
- Compassionate conversations



3. Ongoing support

How do we build a supportive environment where our teams feel able to turn to us for support?

- Psychological safety



Be kind to yourself. As managers we often have a lot on our plates and it can be hard finding the time to check in with our teams. If this is something you are struggling with you are not alone.

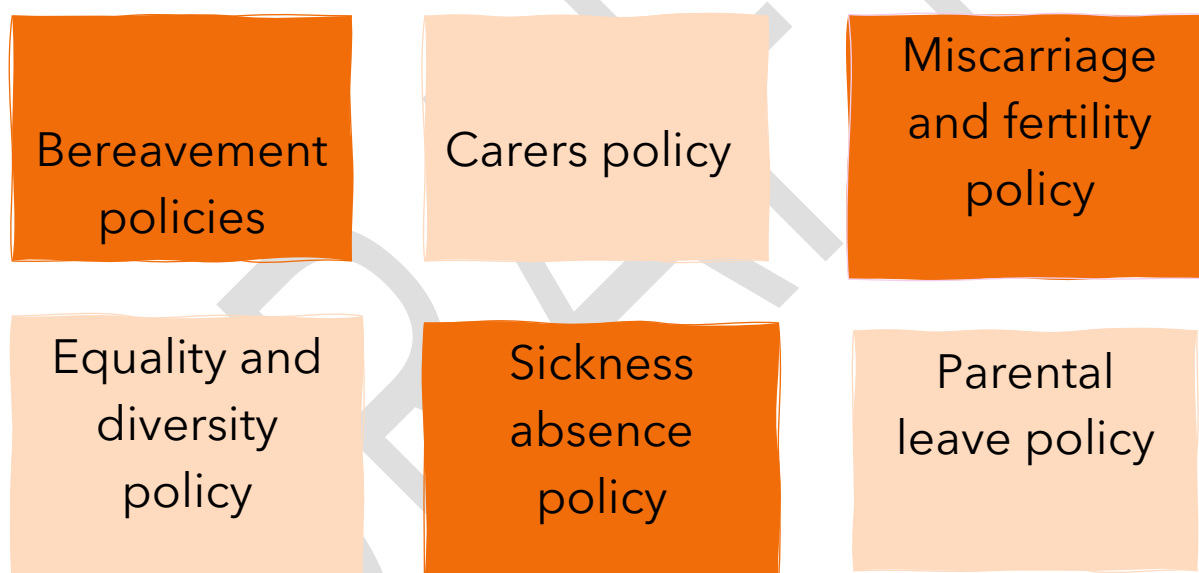
Bajorek⁶ argues that people management and supportive relationship building with our team can be 'squeezed' out of our busy schedule.

Organisational guidance

One way we can better balance 'human being' and 'human doing' processes is by fully understanding the policies in place. Often, the first time we are seeing policies and procedures is when we are having to use them which can feel overwhelming.

If we are aware of processes ahead of time we can feel more prepared, provide accurate information and are able to be present in supporting our colleague. We can focus on 'human being elements', compassionately supporting staff, instead of trying to find the right information.

Things to consider familiarising yourself with:



Lightbulb moment: Organisational policies and how they are implemented can have a very real impact on our teams.

ComRes 2014 research for the National Council for Palliative Care found 56% would consider leaving their employer if treated poorly during their grieving process⁷.

Relevant legislation

Depending on what your colleague is experiencing, they may be entitled to additional legal support and protection. As a manager, it is helpful to be aware of the legislation in place for UK employees, however please discuss with your HR colleagues for further advice when supporting your teams.

Legislation differs in Northern Ireland, please seek HR advice.

Carers

The [Employment Relations \(Flexible Working\) Act⁸](#) and the [Carer's Leave Act⁹](#) apply in England, Wales and Scotland (rules differ in Northern Ireland).

The Employment Relations (Flexible Working) Act⁸ means that from their first day on the job, all employees, including carers, have the statutory right to request flexible working. Employers must deal with requests in a reasonable manner but are not required to agree every request.

Employees have a statutory entitlement to up to one working week of unpaid Carer's Leave in each rolling 12-month period to provide or arrange care for a dependant with a long-term care need. This entitlement applies to all employees, regardless of their length of service.

Carers providing unpaid care are entitled to a [carer's assessment](#) to access support.

For further information see Gov.UK website on 'Caring for someone':

<https://www.gov.uk/browse/disabilities/carers>

Emergencies

The [Employment Rights Act 1996¹⁰](#) stipulates that employers must give someone 'reasonable' time off to deal with an emergency involving a dependent. For example, a breakdown in care arrangements.

This time off is likely to be short-term, around one or two days, but there is no legal definition of how long a reasonable amount of time off should be. The right is to deal with the immediate emergency rather than to provide ongoing care.

Employers do not have to pay their employees for emergency time off.

For further information see the Gov.UK website on 'Time off for family and dependants':

<https://www.gov.uk/time-off-for-dependants>

Disability

Under the [Equality Act 2010](#)¹¹ employees with a disability are protected from discrimination. Employers have a duty to consider reasonable adjustments where a disabled employee is placed at a substantial disadvantage because of their disability. Some health and mental health conditions may amount to a disability under the Equality Act 2010. Some conditions are automatically treated as a disability, including:

- cancer
- a registered visual impairment
- multiple sclerosis
- HIV infection - even if the person doesn't have any symptoms

Disabled employees may also be eligible for support through the Government's Access to Work scheme: <https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work>

Bereavement leave

Currently there is no statutory bereavement leave following a death (outside of Parental Bereavement Leave).

However, the [Employment Rights Act 2025](#)¹² relating to bereavement leave is changing. Managers should consult HR for the current position where an employee experiences a bereavement. Organisations may also provide compassionate leave following pregnancy loss or miscarriage, and managers should seek HR advice where this arises

Legislation differs in Northern Ireland. Where someone experiences a miscarriage before 24 weeks, two weeks of paid leave is already in effect¹⁴, recognising the emotional impact this can have¹³

Parental bereavement leave

There is a separate entitlement known as [Parental Bereavement Leave](#)¹⁵. This provides two weeks of leave for parents in England, Scotland and Wales who experience the loss of a child under the age of 18, or when a pregnancy ends after 24 weeks (rules differ in Northern Ireland).

Employees may be entitled to parental ([maternity](#) and [paternity](#)) leave after a stillbirth or when a baby dies after being born.

For further information see Gov.UK website on 'Statutory Parental Bereavement Leave and Pay': <https://www.gov.uk/parental-bereavement-pay-leave>

Pause and reflect

Often, we haven't located or read through all the people policies in our organisation. Take a moment to identify what organisational or team specific information you would need to share with colleagues in each example.

For example, relevant policies for an employee following a bereavement may include: compassionate leave policies, flexible working policies, or reasonable adjustments. If you are unsure where to find these, speak to your HR team.



Individual reflection: What organisational or team specific information would you need to share with a colleague who lets you know that they are:

- A carer:

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- Grieving:

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- Living with a life-limiting or terminal illness:

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Compassionate leadership principles: the King's Fund

When sharing 'human doing' processes with our colleagues, we need to prioritise the 'human being'. Really hearing their individual experience and responding compassionately, centres that person's needs in any support actions.

The King's Fund³ identified four key components which make up compassionate leadership:

Identified in Bailey and West³



Attending

This means being fully present with someone, giving them your full attention when they are sharing something negative or positive³. Finding a quiet space for private conversations, or protecting one-to-one time for staff can be crucial to having this dedicated time to listen to their needs.



Understanding

This is about 'taking time to explore'³ what someone is going through, without jumping in to fix it. Get to know who makes up your team and recognise that each person's stress and worries look different. When we understand someone's experience and challenges we can offer support that fits what they need.



Empathising

This means being emotionally present, acknowledging someone's pain or sadness without trying to solve it or make it about us. It's about saying, "I hear you, and it's OK to feel this way." Empathy helps people feel safe, supported, and less alone.



Helping

This is where we take action. That might mean adjusting shifts, checking in, or making sure someone has time to rest and take breaks. It's more than signposting. It's about removing barriers and showing we care through what we do, not just what we say.

Compassionate conversations

Conversations about support and next steps, whatever your colleague is experiencing, can feel scary and vulnerable for both you and your team member. The following six principles remind us how to be present and respond compassionately in sensitive conversations:

6. Consider other perspectives

- welcome other experiences, withhold any judgements and don't project your own experiences back on the person. Be mindful of sharing personal experiences without permission; it can be helpful for some people to share experiences, however, make sure you are prioritising the employee's needs.

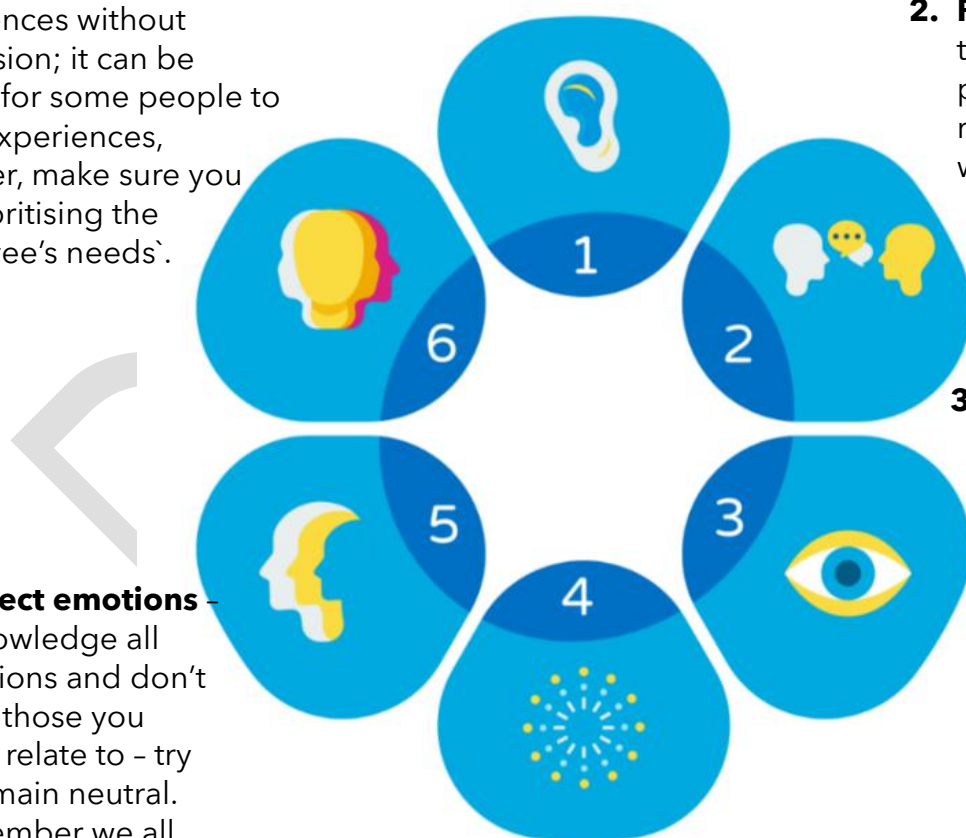
1. Listen attentively - pay undivided attention, be present in the conversation not just listening for an opportunity to respond. If you are in a work setting think about how you can minimise distractions so you can be fully present. Turn on 'do not disturb' notifications, find a private room and avoid busy settings.

2. Respond mindfully - take a moment to process before you respond and consider what you have heard.

3. Be observant - notice details, body language, mood and attitude - try to maintain an open posture, be patient whilst they talk and try not to seem restless. This can make people feel like you have somewhere else you need to be, or that the conversation is making you uncomfortable.

5. Respect emotions - acknowledge all emotions and don't deny those you don't relate to - try to remain neutral. Remember we all have different responses to the same situation.

4. Manage silence - learn to sit comfortably in the silence. Silence is healthy and sometimes it is all the comfort someone needs. Practice sitting in the 'discomfort' of silence.

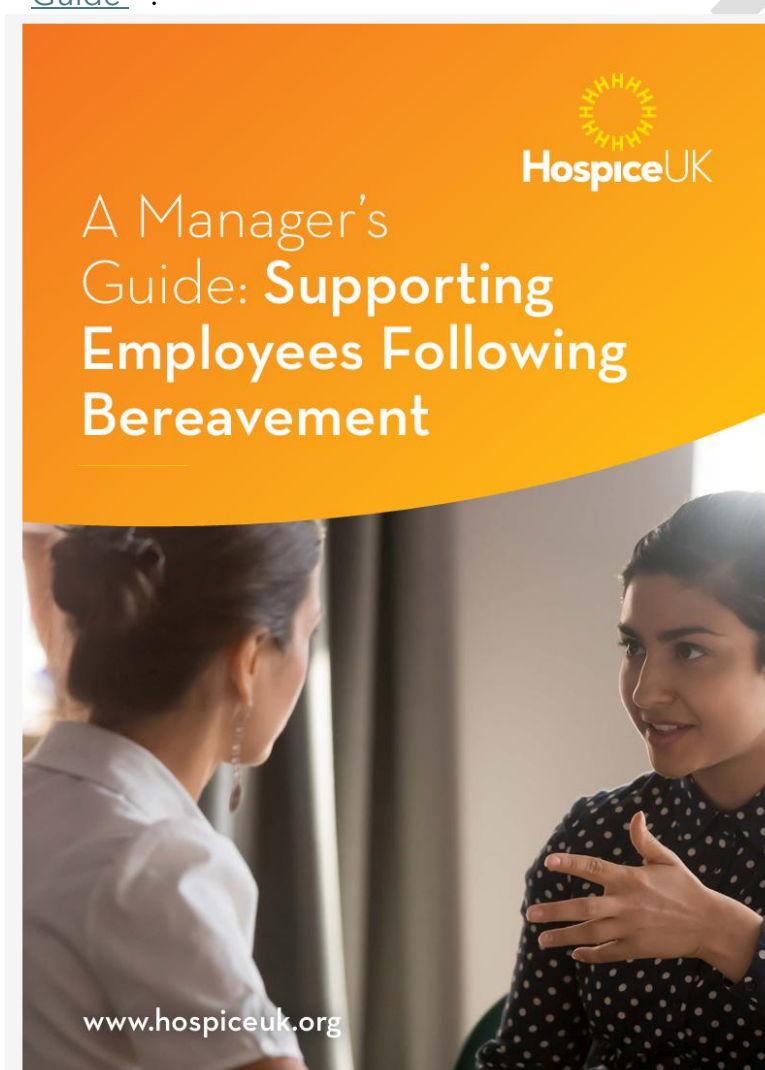


Practical tool: managers guide

As managers we often worry a lot about getting these important conversations wrong because we really care. We can put a lot of pressure on ourselves.

Each individual is different and getting to know our team well will support us in supporting them better. This process is important and requires intentional time and our '[Get to Know Me](#)'¹⁶ document is a helpful tool you can try.

However, for further support around how to begin these conversations about support/ next steps for a colleague following a bereavement, see our '[Managers Guide](#)'¹⁷.



These conversation guides have been created to support you in having compassionate and supportive conversations immediately following a death, before a member of staff officially returns to work, or on their first day back.

Before discussing next steps with your colleague, send any questions in advance to allow the employee to think about what information they would like to share and empower them to have some control over the support they need in returning.



Lightbulb moment: For more comprehensive information on all of these life moments, please see our 'Support for Line Managers' section of the Compassionate Employers hub.

Supporting our teams

Compassionate leadership doesn't end when we have implemented 'human doing' processes in a 'human being' way. When employees are going through something big in their personal lives, it can really impact on how they show up at work beyond the initial conversations or 'human doing' processes.

People may be worried that they'll never be the same, they may be afraid of making mistakes, of being seen as unreliable, of not being able to focus.

So, what does compassionate leadership look like in those moments?

Key term

Psychological safety is a shared belief that members of a team can take appropriate risks at work without fear of negative repercussions on their social status or career¹⁸.

Psychological safety is:	Psychological safety is not:
open, candid communication	shying away from conflict or disagreement
actively learning from mistakes	everyone feeling comfortable all the time
considering all ideas	necessarily implementing all ideas

Psychological safety looks like creating a team culture where people feel safe to say, "I'm not OK today" - where there is space to take part, even after life has changed for them.



Lightbulb moment psychological safety emerged in the business sector in the 1990s. The concept was furthered by Edmondson's 1999 study which applied psychological safety within healthcare settings and illustrated its potential in enhancing teamwork and communication¹⁸.

Ito et al discuss recent studies which demonstrate psychological safety influences patient safety, collaboration, 'learning from failures and reporting adverse events'¹⁹.

Psychological safety

In a psychologically safe environment, people feel able to ask questions, share ideas, discuss errors and jointly consider solutions²⁰. This does not mean that there is no accountability - rather the culture means that learning is prioritised over judgment and punishment.

According to Amy Edmondson's research²¹, there are four domains of psychological safety²²:

1. Inclusion and diversity

- Do team members feel they can be themselves?
- Do they feel like they belong at work?
- Do they feel their experiences and expertise are valued?

2. Willingness to help

- Do team members feel they can ask for help without judgment?
- Do they feel colleagues are willing to support them?
- Is there a culture of helping each other?

3. Attitude to risk and failure

- Do team members feel it will be OK if they make an error or take a risk that doesn't pay off?
- Is there a culture of learning over judgment in the face of mistakes?

4. Open conversation

- Do team members feel safe to contribute ideas?
- Is there a culture of open candid conversation including around sensitive or challenging topics?

Headings adapted from Cote²²

Practical tool: building psychological safety

Psychological safety is an ongoing process. Interpersonal dynamics are delicate and ever changing and organisational culture can take time, team buy-in and consistency to shift. Managers are key to leading this process.

If we are 'supportive, coaching-oriented, [...] non-defensive [...] members are likely to conclude that the team constitutes a safe environment"²¹.



Individual reflection: What is one thing you can do in each domain to support psychological safety for your team?

1. Inclusion and diversity

e.g. challenge unkind language or behaviour

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2. Willingness to help

e.g. weekly practical support check-in across team-distribute tasks/support accordingly

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3. Attitude to risk and failure

e.g. open about mistakes you have made and what you learnt from them

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4. Open conversation

e.g. in idea gathering sessions, ensure time for everyone to contribute before moving on

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Headings adapted from Cote²²

Pause and reflect

Psychological safety is about open and candid communication and actively learning from our experiences.

However, be kind to yourself in these reflections - we are all trying our best in often challenging situations. You don't need to answer any questions that feel unsafe or distressing.



Individual reflection: Think about a time that you supported someone through a difficult life moment.

- What was most helpful about the support you offered them?
- Looking back, is there anything you would have done differently?
- What did you learn from the experience?

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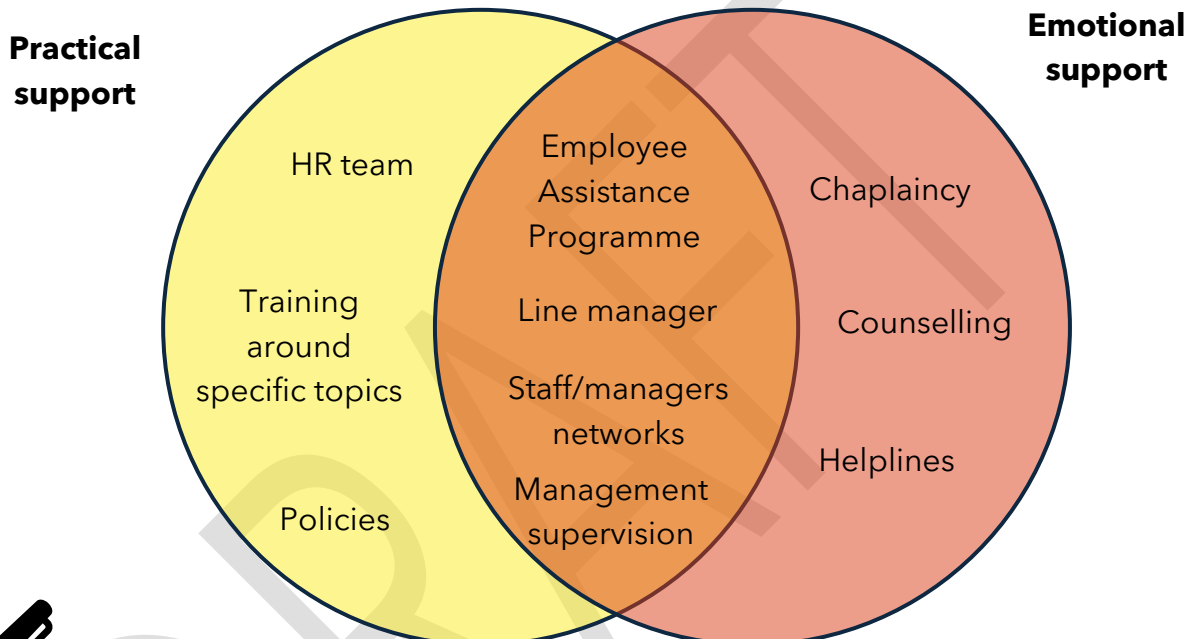
Important note! If this content brings up distress, speak to someone you trust and access your organisation's support routes, such as your manager, supervision, occupational health, Employee Assistance Programme, HR, GP or urgent support if needed.

Supporting ourselves

Be kind to yourself. When we are busy supporting our colleagues, we can forget about the impact on us. We may have our own emotional response, and this can be particularly intense if you know your colleague well or if their situation brings back memories of our own experiences.



We don't have to do it all alone and there is support available. Our workplace also plays a large role in supporting our wellbeing.



Individual reflection: Make a note of what support is available to you in your hospice:

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Important note! If you are experiencing distress, speak to someone you trust and access your organisation's support routes or urgent support if needed.

Worksheet: individual activity

Case scenario reflections

Compassion and psychological safety become especially important when people are going through something big in their personal lives. When employees are dealing with things like grief, illness, or caregiving, it can impact on how they show up at work. They may be afraid of making mistakes, of being seen as unreliable, of not being able to focus.

In hospice settings where our work means being close to people's lives and their losses, it can be very challenging for our teams when facing their own struggles.

Reflect on the following case examples, and how your hospice would support a staff or volunteer member in each case.

Important note!

Individual activity guidance

- You do not need to answer any questions that feel too personal, unsafe or difficult.
- Pause at any point.
- If this content brings up distress, speak to someone you trust and access your organisation's support routes, such as your manager, supervision, occupational health, Employee Assistance Programme, HR, GP or urgent support if needed.

Be kind to yourself. These are sensitive scenarios and may bring up personal experience. Take a break at any point.

It is OK if you don't know all the answers. Take your time with these scenarios and if you need further guidance, ask your HR team.



Individual reflection: Consider how you/your hospice would approach each scenario.

Scenario:

A colleague shares with you they have been diagnosed with a life limiting illness. They say they do not want to share more but will need to attend hospital appointments.

Think about:

- *how you would open the space for an honest conversation*
- *what support and adjustments you can offer*
- *what are the signs that might suggest more support is needed?*

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Scenario:

You are a close team and know that your colleague and their partner have been going through IVF treatment. Your colleague was excited to share the news that they were expecting a baby. A few months later they were very upset and said their partner had had experienced a miscarriage. They ask if they can go home to look after their partner.

Think about:

- *how you would open the space for an honest conversation*
- *what support and adjustments you can offer*
- *what are the signs that might suggest more support is needed?*

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Scenario:

An employee gets in touch to say her brother has recently been diagnosed with terminal cancer. She doesn't know what the prognosis is but wants to know what flexibility can be offered so that she can take her brother to appointments and spend time with him in the coming weeks and months.

Think about:

- *how you would open the space for an honest conversation*
- *what support and adjustments you can offer*
- *what are the signs that might suggest more support is needed?*

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Scenario:

A member of your team has been bereaved recently and her mother died at the hospice where you both work. She returns to work, but she is struggling emotionally when delivering care to patients who remind her of her mother. She seems distant but she wants to stay at work.

Think about:

- *how you would open the space for an honest conversation*
- *what support and adjustments you can offer*
- *what are the signs that might suggest more support is needed?*

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Worksheet: individual reflection

Compassionate return to work conversations

Coming back to work can be daunting for the person who has been through what can be life-changing experiences. You can play a critical role in supporting a team member in returning to work after any difficult life event.

Barjork argues 'You don't need to be occupational health or clinical psychologists ... managers can play a large part in helping employees return to work'⁶.

This conversation guide draws on The Flourish model⁶ which identifies managerial actions which can support employees in the workplace. While Edwards' work²³ applies to the support of mental health in the workplace, arguably this structure can be applied to supporting employees returning to work.

This conversation guide draws on the model's²³ steps and includes conversation starters specific to returning to work after absence:

Important note!

Individual reflection guidance

- You do not need to answer any questions that feel too personal, unsafe or difficult.
- Pause at any point.
- If this content brings up distress, speak to someone you trust and access your organisation's support routes, such as your manager, supervision, occupational health, Employee Assistance Programme, HR, GP or urgent support if needed.

Conversation (formal and informal)

It is important to arrange a time and place that feels comfortable for colleagues. Particularly in the initial return to work discussion, you may need to follow your organisation's formal HR processes. Once your colleague has returned to work it can be helpful to take them aside for a quick informal chat/check in.

- "Lets find some time to discuss what would be helpful for you upon your return to work."
- "It can feel overwhelming to think about the next steps. Is there a time/day/space that feels comfortable for you?"



Individual reflection: further notes

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Identification

We want to create space for colleagues to share how they are truly feeling. This helps you identify any additional support they may need in the coming weeks and months.

- "How are you feeling about returning to work?"
- "Is there anything that would make this transition easier for you?"

Individual reflection: further notes

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Workplace adjustment

Some people worry about returning to work because they fear they won't be able to keep up with their workload or perform as they would usually. Asking about possible adjustments can help them recognise what support might be helpful. We also recommend explaining any workload that has been reallocated during their absence and opening a conversation about how they would like this to be managed on their return.

- "I recognise that work can feel overwhelming. Do you feel ready to resume your usual responsibilities, or would a phased return or reduced workload be more manageable?"
- "Would temporary adjustments to your duties or hours be helpful?"

Individual reflection: further notes

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For many people, flexibility is essential, especially if they are experiencing changing needs, medical appointments or administrative tasks. This may include adapting working hours, location, or responsibilities, or simply offering trust and space to take personal calls or attend appointments during the working day. Understanding what flexible arrangements are available can help employees feel more comfortable about returning to work.

- "Are there any upcoming appointments or personal tasks you'll need time for?"
- "Would flexible working arrangements support you during this time? For example, home working, fewer meetings, or a phased return?"

Individual reflection: further notes

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Collaboration

It's important that employees have ownership and autonomy over their experience. Transparency over what can or cannot be done is vital in giving an individual as much agency over their support as possible. For example, it may be necessary that the team is informed about the colleague's return to work. Clear communication about what the team knows and agreeing a plan for how colleagues can offer support can help prevent awkward or uncomfortable interactions for everyone involved.

- "Would you like me to share any information with the team about your return to work?"
- "How would you prefer colleagues to approach and support you?"

Individual reflection: further notes

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Review

Challenges do not end when someone returns to work. One of the most meaningful forms of support is ongoing recognition and regular check-ins. It's important to follow the employee's lead, some may prefer to seek support outside of work, while others may value the care and understanding offered by their manager and colleagues.

- "How would you like me to check in with you, for example, regular meetings, emails, or something else?"
- "Are there any important dates you'd like to share so we can be mindful of them throughout the year? For example, anniversaries or birthdays."
- "If you feel comfortable, we could complete a '[get to know me](#)'¹⁶ form together to help me better understand how to support you."

Individual reflection: further notes

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Glossary

- **Compassion** is the feeling of empathy that we have for others' pain which motivates us to act to help relieve their suffering².
- **Compassionate leadership** is about taking the time to build strong, trusting relationships with your people. It means actively listening, understanding, and empathising with them.

Leading with compassion helps people feel 'valued, respected, and cared for - enabling them to reach their potential and deliver their best work. There is clear evidence that compassionate leadership results in more engaged and motivated staff with high levels of wellbeing, which in turn results in high-quality care'³.

- **Empathy** describes the ability to experience another person's perspective, understand their experience and feel their emotions. This process involves complex cognitive, emotional and physiological mechanisms²⁴.
- **Vulnerability** refers to 'the emotions we experience during times of uncertainty, risk and emotional exposure'²⁵.
- **Life-limiting illness** is one which cannot be cured, though it can be treated, and which will likely shorten a person's life.
- **Terminal illness** is one that is incurable; however, the effects of the illness can be managed so that a person can live with it for days, weeks, months or even years.
- **Carers** are employees with significant caring responsibilities that have a substantial impact on their working lives.

These employees are responsible for the care and support of a child with a life-limiting condition, or a relative or friend who is older, disabled or seriously ill and unable to care for themselves.

- **Bereavement** is experienced because of the death of someone important to us. Societally there are processes, expectations and ritual which culturally signify bereavement²⁶.
- **Grief** is the emotional response to a significant loss or anticipated loss, whether through death or through living losses. It is a universal human experience, and it is described by O'Connor²⁷ as an often-painful emotional state that repeatedly rises and fades.

- **Professional grief** is the type of grief experienced by individuals as part of the work they do²⁸. This could include the death of a patient or someone with whom you have built strong professional relationships.
- **Disenfranchised grief** is a type of grief that is often misunderstood, unacknowledged, unexpressed, undervalued, or invalidated by others or social norms. Disenfranchised grief can feel similar to grief through bereavement and is experienced by the individual as a significant loss while not being granted the space to grieve.

Some examples may include: breakdown of relationships, estranged friendships, loss of job, loss of prior abilities, relocation or stigmatised deaths²⁹.

- **Anticipatory grief** refers to feelings of grief or loss that you may feel before the loss happens. For example, this could include feelings of grief for a loved one living with a life-limiting condition.

Rando³⁰ further includes in anticipatory mourning not only the grief at the realities that they or a loved one will die but further the lost experiences and expected future.

- **Mourning** while often used interchangeably with grief, mourning has been defined as personal and public expression of grief.

Brabant³¹ suggests that mourning encompasses social expectations of what grief should look like and cultural definitions of how we should grieve that loss.

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