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HR teams 'struggling to deal with workplace bereavement'

Annie Makoff 10 Jan 2017 4 comments



Lack of policies and procedures highlighted as a concern; employees with terminal illnesses also lack support

Almost half of HR departments struggle to manage the impact of bereavement in the workplace, new research has revealed.

According to the study by MetLife Employee Benefits, 13 per cent of HR professionals said they had been required to manage the aftermath of an employee's death over the past two years, while 31 per cent provided support for staff coping with family bereavement.

Yet 45 per cent admitted they did not have agreed policies in place to deal with workplace bereavement, and almost two-thirds (64 per cent) said they did not have procedures for supporting

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employees living with a terminal illness.

Katrina Pritchard, senior lecturer in organisation studies in the Department for People and Organisations at the Open University, told People Management: "HR departments have traditionally focused on childcare rather than caring across the lifetime. It's been a neglected area but, now that the ageing population is drawing attention to caring responsibilities and how they have an impact in the workplace, it's starting to come to light.

"There are organisations that have campaigned for this sort of attention for a long time, but maybe now more more thought is being given to ageing and terminal illness and that will lead HR leaders to look at it more seriously."

Despite the lack of procedures in place to manage the impact of workplace bereavement, the research also found that the majority of HR departments recognised the importance of providing support, with 92 per cent already offering flexible working to staff suffering a bereavement, 24 per cent providing access to be eavement helplines and 13 per cent offering face-to-face counselling.

In addition, two out of five were currently considering bereavement training for line managers and a third were considering introducing specialist support services.

Tom Gaynor, employee benefits director at MetLife UK, said: "Bereavement is sadly something that will affect most employees and companies need to have agreed procedures in place to ensure staff and their families have support when they need it. Companies clearly want to be supportive and sympathetic, but it is surprising that so many do not have clear policies and procedures in place for bereavement in the workplace. HR departments recognise it is an issue but need support in addressing it."

The issue of bereavement hit the headlines last year, after <u>campaigners lobbied for parents who lost</u> <u>a child under the age of 18 to receive two weeks' statutory leave</u>. At present, there is no requirement for any employee to receive time off following a bereavement, just 'reasonable' absence to cover an emergency, which is normally taken to include a family death or serious illness. The bill has received two readings in parliament and is likely to become law in the near future.



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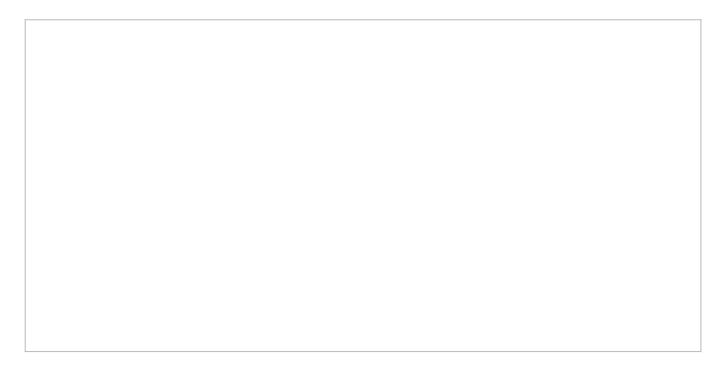
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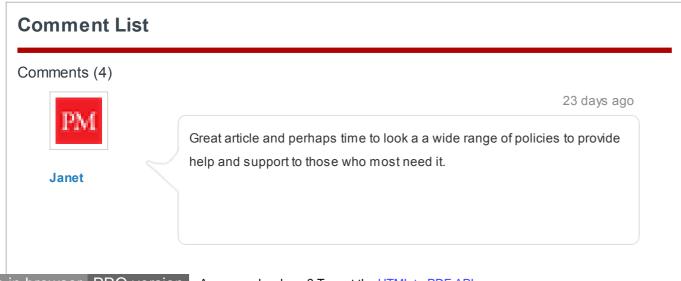


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Kim

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It was pointed out to me today by an associate that their company leave policies allow more time off on full pay for charity volunteering than they do for bereavement, compassionate or carer's leave.

How does that work??

I am all for giving back for the greater good, but strikes me that policies like this lack the very empathy and support ethic for employees that they are meant to exemplify.



lan Scott

26 days ago

Legislation cannot replace common sense and a flexible approach when dealing with this most Human of Human Resources issue.



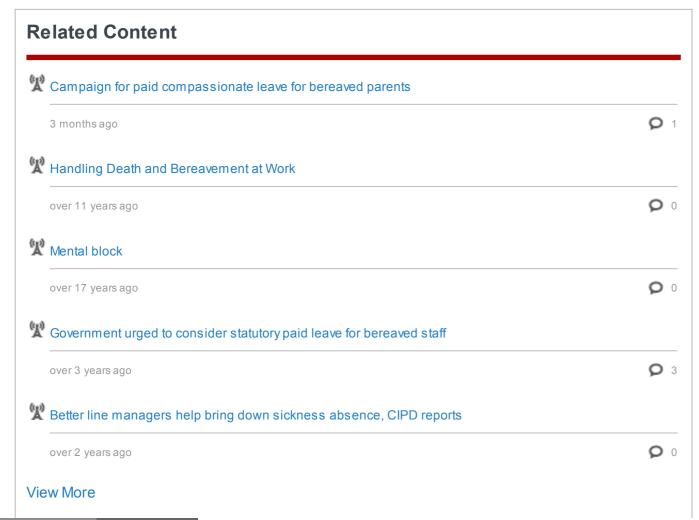
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28 days ago

It shouldn't be an impossible procedure to achieve, having it, among other benefits and interactions with efficiency, will build on employees attachment and work/life balance. Organizations needs to be initiative whenever the law lacks bereavement support (though baselines are required), as it is a critical point that is associated with emergency situations.

Management training is a positive step, but internal procedure in place will empower HR / employees engagement, and provide structured support to employees when they need it, on the other end.. if management was not on supportive side, then reference to procedure will be helpful.

Thanks Annie for the topic











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