



Pregnancy Loss Research Group

Pregnancy Loss & the Workplace

A Toolkit for
Employers
& Employees







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Section I Background

Why we did this work

The PLACES Project¹ was commissioned in September 2022 by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth to examine the workplace experiences of people experiencing pregnancy loss. One of the Project's key recommendations was that workplaces should create clear policies and practices to create more compassionate work environments and better experiences for people whose pregnancies end in loss. This toolkit is informed by the findings from the PLACES Project and a review of guidance and policies available from pregnancy loss charities, support organisations and public bodies.

The toolkit focuses primarily on people who experience pregnancy loss prior to 23 weeks gestation, but much of what is discussed, particularly the different ways that employees and workers (herein referred to as employees) can be supported beyond leave entitlements, is relevant to those experiencing pregnancy loss after 23 weeks.

Pregnancy loss in the workplace

Pregnancy loss remains a taboo discussion in most workplaces, despite being a more common event than many people realise. In Ireland, an estimated 1 in 4 pregnancies will end in miscarriage, and an estimated 1 in every 250 pregnancies will end in stillbirth. It is likely that there is someone in your workplace who has had, or their partner has had, a pregnancy loss.

Section 1 Background

This toolkit is for:

- **Employers (Section 2):**

To provide a structure and resources to help you develop your own workplace specific pregnancy loss policy and to ensure you are providing your employees and colleagues the best possible support in what can be an emotional and potentially traumatic event in their lives.

- **Employees who experience pregnancy loss (Section 3):**

To provide you with information about your rights as an employee and guidance on how best to navigate work after experiencing a pregnancy loss.

- **Work colleagues (Section 4):**

To help you better understand pregnancy loss and how it can be experienced and how you can support colleagues who experience pregnancy loss.



The language we use

The language used when speaking to and about people who experience pregnancy loss is important. Employers should use and reflect the language and terminology used by those experiencing pregnancy loss. While terms like 'miscarriage', 'stillbirth' and 'ectopic' may be medically correct, those experiencing pregnancy loss may refer to the loss of their baby for example, and this should be reflected in the language you use when communicating with them.

In this document, we use 'employer' to broadly refer to someone in a managerial position / HR / line manager etc; and we use 'employee' to broadly refer to workers / people in employment / colleagues / those experiencing pregnancy loss.

Types of pregnancy loss

There are many different types of pregnancy loss, and it is important to understand the differences. They are often managed differently and can have different medical implications for the person experiencing the loss.

Table: Types of pregnancy loss

Types of pregnancy loss	Definitions and notes
Ectopic pregnancy ²	An ectopic pregnancy occurs when a pregnancy develops outside the correct location inside the uterus (womb), typically in the fallopian tube. This condition is serious and requires immediate medical attention. Early detection of ectopic pregnancy is crucial. When detected early, healthcare teams can provide treatment options that protect both the pregnant person's life and their future fertility. An ectopic pregnancy cannot develop into a viable pregnancy and is a form of pregnancy loss.
Miscarriage ³	The spontaneous loss of a pregnancy, up to 23 weeks gestation. It can be described as 'early' if it occurs before 13 weeks, or 'late' / 'second trimester loss' if it occurs between 13 and 23 weeks. Miscarriage can also be termed "recurrent" where an individual experiences two or more losses in the first trimester. A missed miscarriage is also known as a silent miscarriage because the common symptoms of miscarriage, ie bleeding and pain, do not occur. The pregnancy stops developing, but the signs of pregnancy continue, giving no reason to suspect a miscarriage. Often it is not until a routine ultrasound scan is performed that the miscarriage is diagnosed, which can be a shocking and upsetting experience.

Continued next page

Types of pregnancy loss	Definitions and notes
Molar pregnancy⁴	A rare form of pregnancy in which a non-viable, fertilised egg implants in the uterus but fails to develop normally. It occurs when the sperm and egg join together and there is excessive development of the cells that form the placenta with little or no fetal (baby) development. It often requires specialist input and follow-up care for several weeks-months.
Neonatal death⁵	The death of a live born baby within the first 28 days of life.
Stillbirth⁶	A stillbirth is when a baby is born at or after 23 weeks of pregnancy, or weighing 400g or more, with no signs of life
Termination of pregnancy	A medical procedure which is intended to end the life of a fetus. This may also be referred to as an abortion. This can be for any reason, and includes for medical reasons or where there is a problem with the baby's development. In early pregnancy this may be a medical or surgical procedure and in later pregnancy this may mean having labour induced with medicine.

It is worth noting that people will interchangeably use different words around their own experience and sometimes can have different preferences around what language is used. As mentioned earlier, it is best to reflect back the words and terminology they use themselves.

The needs of people after pregnancy loss may be determined by the type of pregnancy loss experienced and how this was managed. For example, some people will require extensive follow-up for blood tests or medications. As well as medical follow-up, the emotional and psychological impact on people will vary, regardless of their type of loss, so an individualised approach to leave or time-off from work is best.



Losses in fertility treatment or multiple pregnancies

Fertility treatment and pregnancy loss

Increasing numbers of people access fertility treatments to become pregnant. Fertility treatments may be required for a variety of reasons and often require people to attend multiple appointments within a short period of time. IVF failure / embryo transfer failure is when a cycle of fertility treatment is not successful, usually due to failure of the pregnancy to implant correctly.

Pregnancy loss in twin or triplet pregnancies

This is more common than in a singleton pregnancy. Multiple (more than one fetus or baby) pregnancies carry additional risks and rates of pregnancy loss are higher. People experiencing a twin pregnancy may be required to attend the hospital more frequently for appointments and there is a higher chance of preterm birth during these pregnancies.

Impacts: physical, emotional, psychological, social

Pregnancy loss affects people in different ways, and the impact is not limited to those experiencing the loss physically: partners and family members (including any siblings/children) can also be impacted. For the person physically experiencing the loss there are physical effects such as pain, bleeding, fainting, or collapse. In addition, sometimes pregnancy loss requires medical or surgical treatment that may have side-effects or implications for further appointments.

For many people, a pregnancy loss is felt as a bereavement, regardless of how early it occurs. This, understandably, leads to significant upset, grief and anger. People often suffer in silence, or experience 'disenfranchised grief' whereby they feel their grief is not, or cannot, be acknowledged publicly or socially, because it is minimised by society at large.

Psychological distress following pregnancy loss can manifest in different ways. People may have difficulty sleeping or find it hard to concentrate or feel motivated. They may feel tearful or irritable and find social interactions more of a struggle.

Section 1 Background

Socially, people are impacted in different ways. Some may be less inclined to interact with people socially or attend events or celebrations around this time. In terms of 'society at large' there is still a 'taboo' when it comes to discussing pregnancy loss. It goes without saying that this often makes those experiencing the loss feel isolated, alone and ignored.

What we know about employees' experiences of pregnancy loss in Ireland

The biggest source of information we have currently on employees' experiences of pregnancy loss in Ireland is the PLACES Project - Pregnancy Loss in Workplaces: Informing policymakers on support mechanisms. It was commissioned and funded by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, and was led by members of the Pregnancy Loss Research Group in Cork University Maternity Hospital and University College Cork. The aim of the project was to examine the workplace experiences of pregnancy loss before 24 weeks' gestation⁷, and to identify relevant needs and supports.

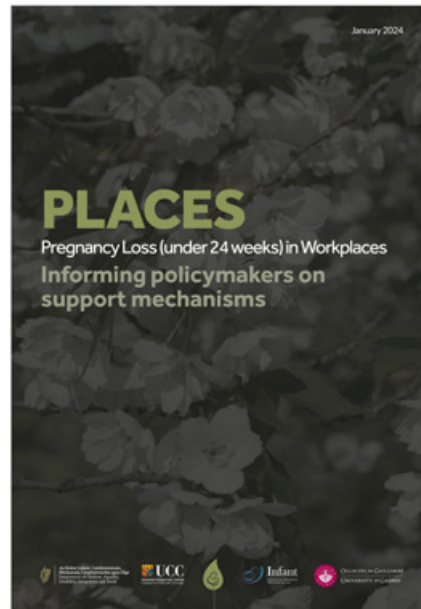
From this report, we know that there is still a significant gap between the individual needs of those experiencing pregnancy loss, and the supports available to them in their workplaces. Many reported returning to work before they were ready due to lack of leave entitlements or fear of discrimination or dismissal or feeling pressure to return to work. Most people took sick leave after their pregnancy loss and only 1% of people surveyed had access to a form of leave specific to pregnancy loss. Those who experienced a termination of pregnancy, or were the partner of someone who had experienced a pregnancy loss, were even less likely to be entitled to time off work.

There is still a stigma attached to pregnancy loss and its discussion in the workplace, even more so for first trimester pregnancy loss and termination of pregnancy. 85% of people who participated in the PLACES survey had disclosed their pregnancy loss at work, with most of these people disclosing to their line manager and/or a limited number of people at work.

Section 1 Background

Participants described fear of dismissal from work and discrimination in career progression opportunities, as a direct result of time off or perceived decreased productivity following a pregnancy loss.

Within workplaces, managers and HR often are uninformed and poorly equipped to provide proper support to their staff who experience pregnancy loss. Oftentimes this leads to negative workplace experiences, reduced productivity, higher absenteeism and sometimes resignation.



Key findings from PLACES

- 3 in 4 people took leave after their pregnancy loss.
- Not wanting to disclose the pregnancy loss was the most common reason for not taking any leave.
- 1 in 5 did not feel supported by their managers after their loss. This was more pronounced for lower income earners and those whose loss did not require medical treatment.
- Almost half of people who did not take leave after their loss reported workload pressures or an expectation to return as the reasons for not taking leave.

Importance of workplace support

The workplace is an important setting for health promotion. In addition, most women of reproductive age are in paid employment and as such, workplaces are an important context to consider in pregnancy loss experiences.

A supportive workplace environment will have a positive impact on what can be an overwhelmingly sad experience for a woman and her partner. In the Republic of Ireland, women are entitled to maternity leave of six months duration only if they experience a stillbirth after 23 weeks of pregnancy. There is no statutory leave entitlement for pregnancy loss before this time. The PLACES Project found a strong desire for leave after pregnancy loss, with 95% of people surveyed reporting that they would take dedicated (paid) leave if it were available to them. Access to leave is important to support both physical recovery and emotional wellbeing after pregnancy loss. Pressuring individuals to return to work prematurely can result in reduced work performance and exacerbate negative emotions, potentially leading to burnout.

“I knew I would be absent for a few days so I explained that I was having another miscarriage. It is hard to take time off in teaching without a good excuse. You quickly become labelled as lazy or a chancer for taking time off. Your absence as a teacher is an imposition on the school.” (First Trimester Miscarriage)

Additional supports beyond leave are also important in the support of people returning to work after pregnancy loss. Supportive work environments help to promote psychological wellbeing after loss and also help to destigmatise pregnancy loss, helping to make employees more likely to access supports.

“I was unusually upset over a very minor thing that happened in work and unexpectedly burst out crying ... I then felt I had to explain why I was so emotional and tearful.” (First Trimester Miscarriage)

Section 1 Background

Supportive workplace cultures also have benefits for the employer. Creating a supportive workplace environment demonstrates a commitment to employee wellbeing and builds a more resilient, inclusive workplace. This helps to enhance employee retention, engagement and productivity by reducing absenteeism and presenteeism. Compassionate supports also improve an organisation's reputation, helping managers to develop key people skills and ensuring alignment with legal responsibilities.

The PLACES Project's key recommendation is that a statutory right to paid leave be implemented, regardless of the type of pregnancy loss experienced. It also recommends leave for partners and that employers/HR develop an organisational policy or framework, outlining information on leave entitlements and other supports available to its employees.

Current legislation regarding leave and leave entitlements

In Ireland, women and their partners are entitled to full maternity and paternity leave following a pregnancy loss after 23 weeks (stillbirth, neonatal death). That includes six months of maternity leave and two weeks of paternity leave, once the individuals qualify for this (i.e. have worked at least 39 weeks of PRSI). Maternity benefit payments are a set amount per week, which can be 'topped up' to match normal wages by an individual's employer.⁸

However, there are currently no statutory provisions for leave for pregnancy losses that occur before 23 weeks. People who experience losses in this timeframe are either faced with an immediate return to work, or using other leave entitlements such as sick leave, pregnancy-related sick leave, compassionate leave and/or annual leave, or unpaid leave.

Table: Types of leave

Types of leave ⁹	Details
Sick leave	As of January 2025, employees in the Republic of Ireland have a statutory right to five days paid sick leave annually as a legal minimum. If more than five days leave are needed, employees may qualify for Illness Benefit which must be certified by a doctor. Employees must have made a number of Pay Related Social Insurance (PRSI) contributions to qualify for this.
Pregnancy-related sick leave	Some employees who work in the public sector, such as teachers or Health Service Executive (HSE) staff, are entitled to this leave. If any employee has a medically certified pregnancy-related illness which renders them unfit for work, they must first use their sick leave entitlements, but where they exceed that allowance, they can employ their pregnancy-related sick leave. It is not counted on sick records. It is worth noting that pregnancy loss is not explicitly included as a pregnancy-related illness.
Compassionate leave	May be given to employees on the death of a close family member. It is not a statutory entitlement and is at the discretion of the employer. Furthermore, pregnancy losses being considered as the death of a close family member is at the interpretation of the employer / HR.
Annual leave	Employees in the Republic of Ireland are entitled to an annual maximum of four weeks of statutory paid annual leave.

Section 1 Background

Some companies / employers have different forms of leave entitlements and/or provide additional benefits or provisions on top of statutory requirements.

Sufficient time off work after pregnancy loss was the most important form of required support stated by participants in the PLACES survey. As mentioned, the PLACES report recommended that statutory leave for pregnancy loss under 24 (now 23) weeks be introduced. There are several bills going through the Oireachtas at the time of writing¹⁰, when or whether a statutory entitlement to paid leave will be introduced remains unknown. In the interim, however, there is a range of measures that workplaces can take to better support workers who experience pregnancy loss.

“Properly defined paid miscarriage leave. I felt guilty taking sick leave because at times over the 4 weeks I was physically ok but emotionally and mentally I wasn’t fit for work. But because I was physically ok, I felt like I should have tried to go to work. Also, the sick leave was dependant on the hospital doctor or my GP giving me a cert, and I was worried at times they might be unsympathetic or say I should try go to work in between scans. What if someone didn’t have a sympathetic doctor or GP? Or someone who wasn’t in my position to get paid sick leave? I would have felt more protected if there was an entitlement to actual paid miscarriage leave.” (First Trimester Miscarriage)

Footnotes Section 1

- 1 Kelly-Harrington R, Hennessy M, Leitaio S, Donnelly M, Murray C, O'Sullivan M, Dalton-O'Connor C, Nuzum D, O'Donoghue K. *PLACES / Pregnancy Loss (under 24 weeks) in Workplaces: Informing Policymakers on Support Mechanisms*. Dublin, Ireland: Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth; 2024. <https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-children-disability-and-equality/publications/places-pregnancy-loss-under-24-weeks-in-workplaces-informing-policymakers-on-support-mechanisms/>
- 2 Ectopic Pregnancy, Health Service Executive (HSE), available at <https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/ectopic-pregnancy/>
- 3 Miscarriage, HSE, available at <https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/miscarriage/>
- 4 Molar Pregnancy, HSE, available at <https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/molar-pregnancy/>
- 5 Neonatal Death, HSE, available at <https://www2.hse.ie/pregnancy-birth/labour/premature-labour/neonatal-death/>
- 6 Stillbirth, HSE, available at <https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/stillbirth/>
- 7 Note: The definition of stillbirth in Ireland was subsequently changed to 23 weeks' gestation through the Civil Registration (Electronic Registration) Act 2024, available at <https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2024/act/27/enacted/en/index.html>
- 8 Bereavement and Childbirth, Citizens Information, available at <https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/birth-family-relationships/miscarriage-and-stillbirth/bereavement-and-childbirth/>
- 9 The information on leave entitlements provided above is accurate at the time of publication (October 2025) and may be subject to future legislative or policy changes.

For more information on leave entitlements: Department of Social Protection: <https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-social-protection/> Citizens Information: <https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/employment/employment-rights-and-conditions/leave-and-holidays/>
- 10 Organisation of Working Time (Reproductive Health Related Leave) Bill 2021 (Bill No. 38 of 2021, Dáil Éireann), available at <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/bills/bill/2021/38/> Pregnancy Loss (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2025 (Bill No. 23 of 2025, Seanad Éireann), available at <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/bills/bill/2025/23/>

Section 2 For Employers



Principles of supporting someone after a pregnancy loss

The following principles should be applied when supporting an employee that has experienced pregnancy loss.

Employers should:

- Be committed to supporting all employees who experience a pregnancy loss, whether it happens directly to them or their partner, regardless of the nature of their loss, or their length of service.
- Recognise that, for many, pregnancy loss can be a bereavement.
- Make no assumptions about how employees suffering a pregnancy loss feel, or how they want to be treated. Employers should aim to outline the support that is available, and advice that may be useful, should an employee need it.
- Consider leave requests fairly, promptly and in a sensitive manner. Mutual trust, respect, and discretion with due regard for employees' circumstances inform these actions.
- Uphold commitments to equality, diversity and inclusion.

Talking about it

Pregnancy loss can be a very difficult time and can have a major impact on someone's physical and mental health and wellbeing. Supporting an employee who has experienced such a loss requires compassion, flexibility and sensitivity. It can and will be difficult to know what to say to someone who has experienced a pregnancy loss. Once an employee has disclosed a pregnancy loss, it is important to acknowledge it. Often people worry about saying the wrong thing and end up saying nothing at all – this has consistently been reported as the worst thing to do and it leaves people feeling isolated and alone. Saying something as simple as 'I'm very sorry for your loss' and asking open ended questions such as 'How are you?' is enough. See Section 4 for helpful phrases that could be used when communicating with someone who has disclosed a pregnancy loss to you.

See Appendix 1 for an example of an email template that could be used when making contact with an employee who has experienced pregnancy loss to see how you can best support them.

Understanding how to respond when an employee has experienced pregnancy loss can be challenging.

Section 2 For Employers

It is common to feel uneasy discussing personal matters in a professional environment, but many people emphasise the importance of a supportive workplace for their wellbeing.

“I feel the whole experience would have been more bearable without pressure from my boss about substitute cover. I should not have had to worry about who would cover my class when I had a sick cert and being made to feel guilty about taking time off.” (First Trimester Miscarriage)

Returning to work after a pregnancy loss can be overwhelming. People may feel any number of ways returning to work:

- Embarrassed, preferring to keep things private
- Apprehensive, and worried about potential discrimination
- Anxious about conversations they will have, or explanations they may feel they need to provide
- Sadness or resentment if another colleague is pregnant, has just had a baby, or is announcing a pregnancy
- Exhausted, both physically and mentally – they may even realise they returned to work too quickly and need more time off.

Employers should foster a compassionate workplace that is open, respectful and consistent. This will enable people to feel psychologically safe and may facilitate more honest and open discussions with employees. Psychological safety is where people feel they can voice concerns, speak up, question things, and share ideas freely without fear of judgement or criticism.

“I am very grateful for my manager’s support and their openness in me being able to share my story, which helped the transition back to work. Everyone was extremely supportive and reinforcing of the fact that I need rest, deserve sympathy, etc. being able to openly talk about my loss with those few that got to know my journey. My emotional wellbeing was top of mind for my manager and she would check in with me regularly so it was easy to be transparent with where I’m at. Flexibility offered on the back of it in terms of working time was extremely empowering.” (Second Trimester Termination of Pregnancy)

Supports that can be put in place

At an appropriate time, employees should be asked about what they need. Be prepared that they may not know what they need immediately. This is where having an organisational policy and reliable supports and resources in place can be helpful.

Things to consider including in policy and resource development are:

Table: Supports

Supports	Notes
Time off	Needs to be individualised and take into consideration the employee's needs which may be influenced by several factors; for example, the physical and/or emotional / psychological impacts of the loss, when the pregnancy ended or timing of the pregnancy loss, or if this is a first or repeat loss.
Sick pay	Needs to be aligned with employee's legal entitlements.
Phased return to work	Can include, for example, amended work hours, buddy- supports, shadowing days, flexibility on hours.
Flexible working / reasonable accommodations	For example, it may be possible to facilitate remote working or working from home; less expectation to attend meetings, travel or undertake public-facing roles; videos off for online-calls; extended deadlines; modified duties.
Confidentiality	Information or disclosure of the pregnancy loss should always be at the employee's discretion. They may or may not want colleagues to know, and employers should be open to facilitate this communication if that is their preference.

Supporting partners

It is strongly encouraged to provide some supports for partners also. Partners can be equally as affected by pregnancy loss. Their own psychological needs are often unacknowledged or neglected – on individual and societal levels – as the focus is placed on them being the protector and supporter of their partner.

“Something needs to be offered for men too. We had a number of pregnancy losses, and this loss hit him hard. He needed time off work and ended up taking sick leave but felt guilty about it.” (Molar Pregnancy)

Partners can be supported at the workplace by facilitating:

- Paid time off work to attend appointments with their partner relating to the pregnancy loss.
- Paid time off to support their partner and process their own grief in the immediate aftermath of a pregnancy loss. Support to their partner may be emotional support, but also be physical or practical supports, for example, post-surgery recovery assistance or taking care of other children.

- Their immediate departure from work if they learn about their partner's pregnancy loss when at work, ensuring they receive the same level of discretion and support you would afford to anyone in such a scenario.

Supports during and immediately following a loss

The physical effects of pregnancy loss may occur at the workplace and can include:

- Bleeding
- Pain
- Collapse.

Immediate support should focus on empathy, privacy, and removing pressure from the employee to maintain “business as usual.” Some individuals may need help arranging transportation to their home or hospital, as well as someone to accompany them or contact their partner. In cases of severe symptoms, it may be necessary to call an ambulance.

Section 2 For Employers

- Allow for paid leave without requiring a sick note. Avoid forcing staff to use annual leave or unpaid time off. Medical certification is required from the first day of absence to claim statutory sick leave. Individual companies may have their own policy on when certification is required to access sick leave. For more information, see 'Current legislation regarding leave and leave entitlements' in Section 1.
- Respect employees' wishes on who is informed and how the news is shared (if at all). From the PLACES Project, we know that people have different preferences when it comes to the discussion and sharing of their experience. Some prefer complete confidentiality, while others prefer for their news to be shared – some by themselves, some by their employer. Some people will want to talk and share with colleagues on their return to work, while others won't. It is a good idea to have these discussions with your employee before they come back to work.
- Follow up sensitively once the employee has returned; support doesn't end when they walk through the door again.

This may also apply to someone whose partner is undergoing pregnancy loss who may also need to leave work suddenly and this should be supported.

The amount of time off required by people after a pregnancy loss will vary considerably with some welcoming a prompt return to work and their usual routines, while others will find the return to work completely overwhelming. Employees should be supported to take full access to leave immediately after a pregnancy loss and be supported to return to work when the time is right for them.

When someone is off work

- Stay in touch (with their permission) – but try not to add pressure to return to work before they feel ready.
- Consider sending them this toolkit and any pregnancy loss policy that has been implemented at your workplace – they are likely to appreciate it even if they have already seen it.
- Ask them what they would like colleagues to know and if they would like you to send an email or share more information.
- Send a card and/or flowers from the team (if they are happy for colleagues to know) or on behalf of the organisation (confidentially).
- Ask whether there is anything you can do to make things easier for them – for example, helping them to navigate organisational policies and procedures regarding leave and notification processes.

Returning to work

Think about the nature of the work and the impact that might have on them. For example:

- Do they work with babies or very young children, or related goods and services?
- Do they have long shifts?
- Does their role require them to stand, drive, or be away from home for long periods of time?
- Do they work alone?
- Do they work with, support or manage people who are in the same stage of pregnancy as the would have been?
- Do they have easy access to a toilet to manage any bleeding or other physical symptoms?

Is there anything you can do to make things easier? You may need to make some allowances for performance over the first few weeks and months back at work.

Some people move on quickly from their initial sadness, whereas others experience intense grief that can last for weeks

or months. Don't expect your employee to feel totally fine as soon as they are back at work. It usually takes some time.

Pregnancy loss can have long-term emotional, physical, and psychological impacts. Supports may be required in the future. Be prepared to offer ongoing support in the following areas:

- **Important dates or events** (for example, ceremonies / burials, due dates, anniversaries, Mother's Day, Father's Day, Christmas, first days of school): These can be emotionally difficult - offer flexibility and acknowledge them if the employee is open to it.
- **Recurrent miscarriage and infertility:** People may have increased needs after recurrent losses and/or if undergoing fertility treatments. Be aware that employees may be undergoing treatment or investigations, which can be emotionally and physically draining. Offer time off for medical appointments and emotional support.
- **Pregnancy announcements and child-focused events:** Be mindful when sharing such news. Provide employees with advance notice or allow them to opt out of baby showers, newsletters, etc.
- **Respecting preferences:** Everyone processes loss differently. Avoid assumptions. Some may want to talk, others may not. Let them lead.

The role of Human Resources or People & Culture

Human Resources (HR) – in some organisations now known as People & Culture – staff also have an important role in providing support to managers and colleagues in how best to approach and interact with people after loss.

HR departments and staff can support line managers by:

- Distribution of this toolkit as a reference guide for managers may help them to plan initial responses, check-in conversations, and return-to-work meetings.
- Remind them that compassion and flexibility are more important than perfect words and encourage them to check in sensitively (and with the employee's permission) over time, not just immediately after the event.

Once a policy is in place and related training is underway, HR should aim to embed pregnancy loss awareness into organisational culture.

- Ensure policy is easily accessible and discussed at induction.
- Encourage regular conversations about wellbeing and loss as part of line management.

- A peer support group could be considered or helping affected individuals identify a "loss ally" network if appropriate may be beneficial.
- Monitor how policies are used – gather feedback and adjust as needed.

Providing a safe and supportive environment

Creating a compassionate, inclusive workplace begins with a strong foundation of clear policy, informed procedures, and staff training if necessary. Raising awareness about pregnancy loss as an important workplace issue and creating an open, compassionate culture will help to destigmatise this taboo topic. Besides these steps, being approachable as a manager is important and responding appropriately can make all the difference.

Policy creation

Introducing a pregnancy loss policy can help reduce stigma and encourage people to seek support. This could be included as a standalone policy or included in existing bereavement and family leave policies. A policy should be inclusive of all types of pregnancy loss and available to all employees,

Section 2 For Employers

regardless of length of service. Be aware that the legal situation regarding pregnancy loss leave entitlements before and after 23 weeks differs significantly (see 'Current legislation regarding leave and leave entitlements' in Section 1).

We have provided a Pregnancy Loss under 23 Weeks Policy Template in Appendix 2.

"I didn't like that it was recorded as sick leave. It's something very different." (First Trimester Miscarriage)

"Pregnancy loss leave would be so nice to have, if it was a specific type of leave available it would ease some of the anxiety about having to take time off." (First Trimester Miscarriage)

A standalone pregnancy loss policy demonstrates that your organisation recognises the emotional and physical impact of all forms of early pregnancy loss. It can help remove some of the taboo associated with pregnancy loss and encourage people to ask for supports when required.

A policy for pregnancy loss under 23 weeks should include guidance on:

- Entitlements to leave including type of leave and duration.
- Procedures to follow for accessing leave as well as additional supports such as counselling and Employee Assistance Programs.
- Reasonable accommodations for promoting a supportive return to work.
- Support for partners.
- Toolkits for managers.
- The importance of maintaining confidentiality.

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A pregnancy loss policy should apply to all employees regardless of gender, sexual orientation or contract type and should be inclusive of all types of pregnancy loss including miscarriage, ectopic pregnancy, molar pregnancy and termination of pregnancy. Partners should also be recognised in a policy.

A policy should allow for adequate time off. The amount of time required will vary greatly from person to person but an initial period of leave that can be taken without providing certification may be beneficial and take the pressure off employees during this often-stressful time. The duration of leave proposed by the Reproductive Health Related Leave Bill 2021 is 20 days for people who have experienced a pregnancy loss before 23 weeks.¹¹ In other countries the duration of leave varies from 2 days to 2 months.¹² Any leave introduced should be of sufficient duration to meet the needs of those affected.

Upon returning to work, employees may request flexible working arrangements, such as adjusted hours or remote work, to facilitate a smooth transition. A phased return could be arranged in consultation with HR and line managers.

“On my first pregnancy loss I didn’t realise how weak I would feel physically and when I returned to work I had to leave later that day before work was over as I felt so weak. It would have been better if I could have taken more breaks or returned for shorter days to begin with.” (First Trimester Miscarriage)

HR should be responsible for issuing clear guidance to managers and staff and provide information on how managers can help provide practical support during and after loss.

All disclosures related to pregnancy loss should be handled with utmost confidentiality. Employees have the autonomy to decide who within the organisation is informed about their situation. Managers and HR personnel should receive training to handle such disclosures sensitively.

Section 2 For Employers

“This type of leave should come with training for workplaces on how workers can support a colleague who experiences a miscarriage. It should also be made clear that a worker only needs to tell the person/manager required to put the leave through. Very clear guidelines on confidentiality should be in place as this is a very sensitive issue. Some people are quite open about it, whereas others are not. This right to privacy should be respected at all times.” (First Trimester Miscarriage)

Policies should be reviewed regularly, ideally annually, to ensure it remains aligned with best practices and legal requirements. Feedback from employees will be integral to this review process.

“I believe if employers had formal miscarriage policies, miscarriage leave, signposting protocols for support etc, designated contact people etc, it would help raise the understanding of miscarriage in the workplace, and perhaps educate people about the stupid things NOT to say to a woman who has suffered this pain.” (Second Trimester Miscarriage)

Procedures

Clearly defined reporting processes help to streamline employee access to support and should prioritise empathy, confidentiality, and flexibility. Employees should know how and who to inform (e.g., line manager, HR contact) if they experience a pregnancy loss. Managers should be provided with step-by-step guidance on how to respond when an employee discloses a loss. They should be made aware of relevant policies and procedures relating to pregnancy loss. It is important to recognise that managers may have lived experiences of pregnancy loss themselves or may find these situations challenging for other reasons and they should be supported in the background by HR.

“Dedicated leave that you can apply for via HR but you don’t need to inform everyone in your department. Making the leave as easy to apply for as possible, without having to deal with multiple people and forms.” (First Trimester Miscarriage)

Training

Offer regular training for line managers and HR staff on how to approach conversations sensitively and respond appropriately. Input from those with lived experiences may be beneficial. There are some formal training courses available through some UK pregnancy loss support groups and can be accessed online/ in-person (e.g. [The Miscarriage Association](#), [Tommys](#) and [Sands](#)). Currently, similar training is not available in Ireland. Details of charities and support organisations in Ireland are available in Section 5.

Other ideas to help support employees

Organise awareness weeks or internal events to support awareness. This will also help to normalise conversations and reduce stigma. This could include:

- Stories from employees (anonymised if preferred).
- Regularly signposting to resources and supports from organisations such as those listed towards the end of this document (Section 5 Further Information and Resources). This could be achieved by distributing information through email chains or

displaying posters throughout the workplace. Internal campaigns and events could be run during Baby Loss Awareness week which takes place from the 9th to 15th October annually.

- Effective support depends on equipping teams with knowledge, confidence, and sensitivity. Training of staff should include understanding types and impact of pregnancy loss and the practical 'dos and don'ts' when supporting someone. It would be important to highlight the varied impact of loss on people and their partners and co-employees and how communication matters in these sensitive situations. Managers and colleagues should be informed on how to manage workplace triggers (e.g. pregnancy announcements, baby-related events).

Footnotes Section 2

- 11 Organisation of Working Time (Reproductive Health Related Leave) Bill 2021 (Bill No. 38 of 2021, Dáil Éireann), Available at <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/bills/bill/2021/38/>
- 12 Kelly-Harrington R, Hennessy M, Leitao S, Donnelly M, Murray C, O'Sullivan M, Dalton-O'Connor C, Nuzum D, O'Donoghue K. [PLACES | Pregnancy Loss \(under 24 weeks\) in Workplaces: Informing Policymakers on Support Mechanisms](#). Dublin, Ireland: Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth; 2024.

Section 3 For employees who experience pregnancy loss

Legal entitlements

At the moment, in Ireland, there is no specific legal right to paid leave for pregnancy loss before 23 weeks. However, several key employment rights still protect employees if they experience a miscarriage, ectopic pregnancy, molar pregnancy, or termination of pregnancy.

Here’s what you should know:

Table: Supports

Supports	Explanation
Leave	If you need time off after a pregnancy loss, you are entitled to take sick leave under your employer’s normal sick leave policy. See ‘Current legislation regarding leave and leave entitlements’ in Section 1. Some employers offer compassionate leave to employees following a pregnancy loss. It’s worth checking your employer’s bereavement, compassionate leave, or family policies to see what additional support is available.
Confidentiality	Employees have a right to confidentiality about their pregnancy loss. Information about health must be handled sensitively and in line with GDPR regulations and employees can decide how much to disclose and who in the workplace knows about their situation.
Right to request flexible working arrangements	While there is no legal entitlement, employees can request flexible working arrangements such as remote work, reduced hours, or phased return following a pregnancy loss. Employers are encouraged to deal with such requests compassionately, though flexibility is at their discretion unless covered by internal policies.
Protection against unfair dismissal	If an employee is dismissed for reasons connected to pregnancy or a pregnancy-related condition (including pregnancy loss), it may amount to unfair dismissal under the Unfair Dismissals Acts 1977–2015. ¹³ Employees have the right to bring a claim to the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) if they believe they have been treated unlawfully.

Always consult HR or legal advice to understand specific entitlements.

Section 3 For employees who experience pregnancy loss

Disclosing the pregnancy loss

Deciding whether to tell someone at work about your pregnancy loss is a deeply personal choice. Some people find it helpful to let an employer know, especially if they need time off, emotional support, or temporary adjustments at work. Others prefer to keep their experience private.

There is no right or wrong way – employees are entitled to protect their privacy and only share what feels safe. If you choose to talk to disclose this information, you should be listened to without judgement, and this information should be kept strictly confidential. Employees are never obliged to share details. Your wellbeing is the priority, and support should never be conditional on how much you disclose.

Sharing an experience of pregnancy or baby loss at work can foster unexpected connections, as others may have faced similar situations but not shared them. You may choose to let colleagues know yourself, or perhaps asking your employer to share the news on your behalf may be easier, if they are comfortable having this conversation. Conversely, if you prefer privacy, employers should understand and respect this.

“One of the reasons I am glad I was public in work about my loss is because since then other colleagues who have had losses have spoken to me about how I handled it in work and about the supports our company provided. I was given a very ad hoc arrangement so others were able to ask for similar support.” (First Trimester Miscarriage)

See Appendix 1 for an example of an email template that could be considered for informing your employer about your pregnancy loss.

Difficult situations

Certain situations may feel harder than they used to. These are completely normal responses.

People often struggle to know how to interact with people who have experienced a pregnancy loss. Comments from people may be insensitive or hurtful. Although often intended to be supportive, these comments can lack sensitivity. Comments like this may unintentionally cause distress. It's okay to feel hurt or angry, and a response is not needed.

Section 3 For employees who experience pregnancy loss

Pregnancy announcements, baby showers, children in the work environment, or colleagues who are pregnant may feel painful or triggering. You may need space from these and/or may like to be excluded from these types of communications, and should inform your employer.

“Physically tired. Emotionally not well. Having to put on a smile for 28 pupils and try to be a good teacher while grieving. I went back too soon and ended up taking a month off, two months later.”
(First Trimester Termination of Pregnancy)

People may avoid and not acknowledge the pregnancy loss. This may not be out of unkindness - they probably just don't know what to say. That said, you're not responsible for making them feel comfortable.

You might want to ask for:

- Advance notice of pregnancy-related events or announcements.
- Time away from group settings or shared spaces for a little while.
- One trusted colleague to check in with you regularly.

Asking for more support

Pregnancy loss can be physically and emotionally intense experience. People deserve kindness, flexibility, and care from their workplace.

If you're unsure what support is available:

- Check your organisation's pregnancy loss, bereavement, sick leave, or family leave policies
- Ask your employer about discretionary compassionate leave. This type of leave may be available and may be granted to employees facing difficult circumstances.

Some people require more formal supports after a loss. Some companies will have access internally to psychological supports such as counselling. Ask your employer about counselling services. See resources in Section 5.

Some people feel best supported by somebody they know who has been through a similar experience of loss. These people are often best equipped to provide comforting messages of support. It may be beneficial to find someone to check in with you regularly.

Section 3 For employees who experience pregnancy loss

“I am not sure if this is something that would get off the ground but maybe even a support group created within the workplace for people who have lost babies. Even a support buddy system eg. If I offered myself as a support to anyone and hr have my name on file and gives the person recently bereaved the option to be put in touch with someone who they could talk to about it all, someone who can relate to what they are going through. Maybe offer grief support/training to people who offer their services.” (First Trimester Miscarriage)

It is important to try and keep communication open with your manager or HR representative.

Challenging discrimination

Unfortunately, some people do experience insensitive or inappropriate treatment at work after a pregnancy loss. You have the right to be treated with dignity and fairness. If you feel you are being treated unfairly due to their loss, you should:

- Keep a record of comments, behaviours, or decisions that concern them.
- Speak with HR or a union representative.

- According to the Employment Equality Acts 1998–2021,¹⁴ it is unlawful to discriminate against employees on the grounds of gender (including pregnancy and pregnancy-related conditions), family status and disability (e.g. if pregnancy loss leads to a mental health condition like depression or anxiety)

This protection means that people cannot be treated unfairly because they have had a pregnancy loss. If you develop a longer-term physical or psychological condition, your employer should consider making reasonable accommodations for you.

- Discrimination based on gender, family status, or disability may be grounds for a complaint to the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC).

Preparing to return to work

Experiencing a pregnancy loss can be devastating, and returning to work afterward may feel overwhelming, confusing, or even surreal. There's no one-size-fits-all response – grief, anger, sadness are all deeply personal emotions. This section is here to help you understand what you might need, what you're entitled to, and how to advocate for yourself as you move forward.

Section 3 For employees who experience pregnancy loss

- You may want to talk to your employer (if you feel comfortable) about what you need.
- You may prefer to phase your return to work—for example, starting with shorter days or remote work, if this applies at your workplace. These options should be discussed with your employer.
- Adjustments to workload, meetings, or face-to-face/people-facing contact may be needed.
- Employers may provide access to counselling supports: for example, they may have an Employee Assistance Programme which employees can avail of counselling through. Or they may sign-post employees to other sources of support, such as those listed in Section 5.

Pregnancy after loss

Pregnancy after loss can be filled with anxiety, fear and hope.

- You are not obliged to disclose their pregnancy early, but there may be practical reasons for disclosing pregnancy loss at work for example to take time off for physical and emotional recovery or to access workplace adjustments.
- Ask for adjustments: time off for scans, more privacy, or flexible work schedules.
- You could let your employer know if certain situations feel emotionally overwhelming, especially around milestones.
- If you've had multiple losses or fertility treatment, you may need additional time or leave.

Section 3 For employees who experience pregnancy loss

Footnotes Section 3

- 13 Unfair Dismissals Acts 1977–2015 (Ireland), available at <https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/>
- 14 Employment Equality, Workplace Relations Commission, available at https://www.workplace-relations.ie/en/what_you_should_know/equal-status-and-employment-equality/employment-equality/employment-equality/

Section 4 For co-workers: How best to support your colleague who has experienced a pregnancy loss

What to say & do, and what not to say & do

From the PLACES report, we know that employees expressed a need for and highly valued emotional support in the workplace. Feeling that their loss is recognised and acknowledged by people in their workplace is important to those experiencing loss.

It can be difficult to know what to say to a colleague who is experiencing pregnancy loss. What we have included below are some helpful phrases and prompts that might aid you to start that conversation with them on (or before) their return to work. Similarly, we have included some things we recommend you do or don't say.



You don't need the perfect words - care and kindness matter most.

Acknowledge the loss if your colleague has shared it with you. It's completely normal to feel unsure. Here are a few ideas for supportive phrases:

- "I'm so sorry to hear about what happened".
- "I'm here if you ever want to talk, but no pressure."
- "Please take all the time and space you need."
- "I don't have the right words, but I care about you."

Saying something is better than saying nothing. Even a short, simple message like "I'm so sorry for your loss" shows you care.

Follow their lead: some people may want to talk, others may not. Let them know you're available without putting pressure on them. Try to reflect their own language and terminology back to them, e.g. 'loss' vs 'miscarriage', 'baby' vs 'fetus'.

Respect your colleague's privacy.

Don't ask intrusive questions or share their news with others unless they've explicitly asked you to.

Section 4 For co-workers: How best to support your colleague who has experienced a pregnancy loss



Be mindful about conversations around pregnancy, babies, or family life in shared spaces. If you're organising events (e.g., baby showers, birthday parties), give them the option to be involved or not, without making them feel awkward.

Avoid clichés like:

- "It was early"
- "At least you know you can get pregnant"
- "At least you have a child already"
- "Everything happens for a reason"
- "You can always try again".

These, while well-meaning, can feel minimising or dismissive.

Do not avoid the person out of your own discomfort.

Be careful when sharing own personal experience with others. People can find it helpful when they hear that others have experienced pregnancy loss; it is important to focus on their needs in that moment and what they find helpful.

If you hear others making jokes, gossiping, or being dismissive:

- Speak up if you feel safe to do so: "That's not appropriate."

- Offer your colleague private support afterwards.
- You can also raise concerns confidentially with HR if needed.

Creating a culture of respect and care protects everyone's wellbeing. Small actions and quiet support from co-workers can make a huge difference to someone navigating the aftermath of pregnancy loss. Your kindness matters more than you know.

Section 5 Further information and resources

Government

Citizen's Information	www.citizensinformation.ie
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My Welfare	https://services.mywelfare.ie/
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Non-governmental / charitable organisations – Ireland

Pregnancy and Infant Loss Ireland	www.pregnancyandinfantloss.ie
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Cork Miscarriage Website	www.corkmiscarriage.com
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Ectopic Ireland	www.ectopicireland.ie
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Féileacáin	www.feileacain.ie
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Miscarriage Association of Ireland	www.miscarriage.ie
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National Gestational Trophoblastic Disease (Molar Pregnancy)	www.gtd-cumh.irelandsouthwid.ie
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Non-governmental / charitable organisations – UK

Miscarriage Association UK Workplace Hub	www.miscarriageassociation.org.uk/workplace
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Sands	www.sands.org.uk
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Tommy's	www.tommys.org
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Section 6 Acknowledgements

We are deeply grateful to the participants of the PLACES project, whose willingness to share their experiences of pregnancy loss provided the foundation for this toolkit. Their insights were fundamental in shaping practical workplace supports to better respond with compassion and understanding. We are also grateful to those with lived experiences of pregnancy loss who kindly reviewed this toolkit, including Jennie Cronin and Tara Woulfe. Their insights helped shape a resource that reflects the realities and needs of those it seeks to support. It can be very difficult to share one's experience of pregnancy loss. We hope that this toolkit will improve the experiences for people whose pregnancies end in a loss.

In addition, we would like to thank members of Mná@UCC (the Women's Network), the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Unit at University College Cork and Cork University Foundation for their support and contributions to the development of this toolkit.

We wish to acknowledge our collaborators on the PLACES Project and the resources developed by pregnancy loss support groups and charities, from which elements of this toolkit have been adapted.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Email templates

These email templates have been adapted from resources developed by Sands and included in their Pregnancy and Baby Loss at Work¹⁵ resource.

For employers: Email template for initial correspondence after an employee has informed you about their pregnancy loss



To: employee@employer.ie

Subject: Thinking of you / Checking in on how we can support you / Our condolences and support / A message from work

Dear XXXX,

I am so sorry to hear about what happened. I want to let you know that my thoughts are with you [and your family] during this difficult time.

Please know that you are not expected to respond to this message right away - or at all, unless you wish to. We simply want you to know that we are thinking of you and we are here to support you in any way we can.

There is no need to think about work now. However I wanted to write and let you know that you are entitled to 2 weeks paid leave, which I will arrange for you. A copy of our pregnancy loss policy and a toolkit for employees/employers after pregnancy loss is attached but please feel free to contact me (or XXXX / a member of the HR team) when you are ready so that we can talk through the practicalities. We can contact you again by email or phone, whichever you'd prefer.

If and when you feel ready, we can also discuss any additional supports you may need. This may include time off, flexible working, or any reasonable adjustments you may need when you return. You may also want to speak to someone in [HR / Occupational Health / Employee Assistance Programme] — we're happy to help arrange that, if it would be useful.

You may/may not want us to share this information with your colleagues. If you would like us to inform other people about your pregnancy loss on your behalf, I am happy to arrange this. Or if you would prefer not to share, we will absolutely maintain that confidentiality.

Please take whatever time you need. If there is anything we can do to support you, either now or in the future, we are here.

With warmest regards,

XXXX

For employees: Email template to let your employer know that you have experienced a pregnancy loss

It is important for you to be aware that different policies may apply for a pregnancy loss before 23 weeks compared to pregnancy losses after this gestation in terms of statutory entitlements to leave. Therefore, it may be important for you to include the gestation of your loss in the email, if you choose to do so. This email template is designed to assist employees informing their employers about pregnancy loss under 23 weeks for this reason, however, similar language could be used when informing employers about a stillbirth or neonatal death.



To: manager@employer.ie

Subject: Personal update

Dear XXXX,

I want to let you know that I have experienced a pregnancy loss (under 23 weeks gestation) [OR] I had a miscarriage / ectopic pregnancy / molar pregnancy / termination (at XX weeks - optional) [OR] my baby [baby's name, if you have given them one and would like to share it] was born on xx/xx (or at X weeks) but sadly died before birth.

This has been a deeply personal and difficult time for me, but I realise that you and I need to have a practical conversation about leave, support and about how much information to share with colleagues. At the moment, I am not ready to discuss this in detail, but I will be in touch when I feel able to talk about next steps regarding work. I appreciate your support and understanding.

I would like to take some time off to rest and process what has happened. Please let me know what the process is for arranging leave. I am/am not aware of our company's pregnancy loss policy, but I have attached this toolkit from the Pregnancy Loss Research Group which has practical advice for employer's on how to support employees after pregnancy loss.

Kind regards,

XXXX

Appendix 2: Pregnancy loss under 23 weeks policy template



This pregnancy loss policy template could be used as a resource at your workplace to create a comprehensive policy that incorporates the physical and emotional supports that may be required for someone who has experienced a pregnancy loss under 23 weeks.

This template should be used as a guide and can be edited to reflect practices and procedures at your workplace. It may be useful to structure your policy using the headings as outlined below.

This policy template was adapted from University College Cork's Pregnancy Loss Support Policy (for pregnancy loss under 23 weeks), which was co-written by the Pregnancy Loss Research Group.¹⁶

Introduction

At [insert organisation name], we recognise the importance of supporting the health of all our employees. The experience of pregnancy loss is unique to each individual, whether it is felt physically, emotionally, or both. With that in mind, we hope that our policy gives employees the framework to talk about their experiences and receive the support they need.

Pregnancy loss affects approximately one in every four pregnancies, most often before 12 completed weeks of pregnancy. Pregnancy loss at any gestation can have physical impacts on women who carried the pregnancy, and emotional and social impacts on women and partners. Most people of reproductive age are in paid employment; as such, the workplace is an important context to consider in pregnancy loss experiences.

Legal rights to leave and pay after the loss of a pregnancy are different depending on when the loss occurs. If the pregnancy is at or over 23 full weeks, full [maternity](#) / [paternity](#) leave rights and entitlements apply. [Consider including a link to your company's policy on pregnancy loss after 23 weeks where applicable].

If the loss happens before 23 full weeks, this loss is not recognised legally with leave and pay, and we have created this policy to address this need.

This policy aims to provide employees with the time, resources and support they need following a pregnancy loss. It outlines the entitlements, procedures, and support mechanisms in place to assist individuals who are affected by pregnancy loss and their families, including for and partners.

Scope

This policy applies to:

- Employees (regardless of contractual status) who experience pregnancy loss before 23 weeks.
- Partners of individuals experiencing pregnancy loss before 23 weeks.
- Employees regardless of gender, type of contract of employment, length of service, role or base.

Who is this policy for?

- Employees (regardless of contractual status) who experience a pregnancy loss under 23 weeks, whether it happens directly to them or their partner
- Line managers of employees who are experiencing or have experienced pregnancy loss
- HR managers and staff
- Colleagues who wish to support fellow employees through pregnancy loss.

It includes miscarriage, ectopic pregnancy, molar pregnancy, and termination of pregnancy. This policy outlines the support and entitlements available to individuals who affected by a pregnancy loss (including partners).

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to establish a clear framework for employees affected by pregnancy loss and to cement our commitment to supporting our employees, and their families, who experience pregnancy loss. This policy ensures that affected employees have access to appropriate entitlements, accommodations, and support services. It also guides managers on handling pregnancy loss requests sensitively and outlines resources available to all employees who have experienced pregnancy loss.

Principles

This policy is underpinned by the following principles:

- [Insert organisation name] is committed to supporting all employees who experience a pregnancy loss, whether it happens directly to them or their partner, regardless of the nature of their loss, or their length of service, their gender/sexual identity or orientation or their length of service.
- This policy recognises that, for many, pregnancy loss is a bereavement.
- This policy also makes no assumptions about how employees suffering a pregnancy loss feel, or how they want to be treated. It instead aims to outline the support that is available, and advice that may be useful, should an employee need it.
- Leave requests will be considered fairly, promptly and in a sensitive manner. Mutual trust, respect, confidentiality and discretion with due regard for employees' circumstances inform these actions.
- Every effort will be made to facilitate leave requests, subject to reasonable notice with due consideration for the particular situation, noting that this may not be possible in an emergency situation of pregnancy loss.
- The principle of equality shall be applied in the interpretation of this policy in keeping with [insert organisation name]'s commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion.

Definitions of Pregnancy Loss

Pregnancy loss can be experienced in many ways, and no two people's experiences will be the same. Pregnancy loss might also be experienced differently for the same person at different times, and it is important to take the lead from the employee on how they experience it (e.g. whether as a loss and/or a bereavement), and the language used to refer to the pregnancy loss (e.g. baby, fetus, pregnancy).

There are different types of pregnancy loss and is important to understand their definitions.¹⁷

- **First trimester miscarriage:** The spontaneous loss of a pregnancy within the first 12 completed weeks of pregnancy.
- **Second trimester miscarriage:** The spontaneous loss of a pregnancy after the 12th completed week and before 23 weeks of pregnancy.
- **Recurrent miscarriage:** Two or more consecutive first trimester miscarriages.
- **Ectopic pregnancy:** When a fertilised egg implants itself outside of the uterus (womb).
- **Molar pregnancy:** Occurs at the time of conception when the sperm and the egg join together and there is excessive development of the cells that form the placenta with little or no fetal (baby) development.
- **Termination of pregnancy:** A medical procedure which is intended to end the life of a fetus.
- **Stillbirth:** An infant born after 23 weeks of pregnancy, or with a birthweight of over 400g, with no signs of life.

Entitlements

Leave

[Insert organisation name] recognises the distress, both physical and emotional, that may result from pregnancy loss and the impact this may have on individual employees, regardless of when or how the loss occurs. This policy has been prepared to provide paid time off and support in relation to pregnancy loss. However, it is appreciated that no situations will be identical, and that people will have different needs, with some people preferring to rest and recuperate without any distraction, while for others being able to continue with their day-to-day activities, while being supported, is their preference.

Employees will be entitled to up to 10 days paid leave following a pregnancy loss before 23 weeks.

There is no requirement for an employee to avail of the full amount of leave; in some situations, an employee may wish to return to work sooner. We understand that every experience is different. We know that employees may not know how much time they will need.

Line managers should agree to speak to the employee after a period of time, such as 3-5 days, to understand their needs for further time away from work. It is recognised that it will not always be possible to request pregnancy loss leave in advance. However, an employee is encouraged to speak with their line manager or a member of the HR Department as soon as possible if they are considering taking pregnancy loss leave in accordance with this policy. NB: Employees who experience later losses (after 23 weeks) are entitled to full maternity/paternity rights, leave and pay. All pregnancy-loss-related leave must be recorded separately by payroll and HR and must not contribute to or detract from other leave owing to the individual.

Additional Leave

Emotional and physical recovery from a pregnancy loss does not follow a set timeframe and every situation is different. It is acknowledged that an employee may therefore require an additional period of absence from work, beyond the initial period of paid leave. This additional absence could be facilitated by the [Flexible working/Bereavement Leave/Sick Leave Policy as applicable] depending on the circumstances.

Pregnancy Loss at Work

If a pregnancy loss begins while at work, employees are encouraged to speak with their line manager or a trusted colleague. They can then arrange for the employee's preferred contact to be notified and find a suitable place for them to remain while any medical care is organised, or arrangements are made for them to travel home.

It is recognised how traumatic the experience may be, both physically and emotionally. [Insert organisation name] wants to ensure that no employee feels that they must go through the experience on their own or continue with their work. The employee's line manager or colleague should agree with them on how their absence will be communicated to others, if needed. They should be assured of confidentiality or principles of same when they do so. Employees who are partners of a person experiencing a pregnancy loss will be allowed to leave work at short notice to provide support.

Accommodations

We recognise that returning to work after pregnancy loss may be challenging and the preferred support will vary from employee to employee. With this in mind, we encourage employees to speak with their line manager about how they can support a return to work. If an employee has any suggestions for steps that can be taken as to support you during this time, they should discuss these with their line manager. Line managers should offer, and employees can request, accommodations such as:

- Phased return to work
- Modified / flexible working hours
- Remote work options, or
- Lighter or modified duties.
- A change to current role and responsibilities.

These requests will be considered on a case-by-case basis and will be made with full consideration of the individual's well-being and their professional responsibilities.

Support for Partners

[Insert employer name] provides support to partners of those who have a pregnancy loss, including access to counselling services and flexible leave options for those who need time off to support their own needs and/or their partner.

Procedures

Requesting leave or support: Employees should notify their manager their need for leave or accommodations after pregnancy loss. A formal request should be submitted with supporting documentation (e.g. medical certification).

Accessing counselling and emotional support: Employees can access the support through the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) for confidential counselling services and emotional support [if this applies at your workplace]. Access to other counselling services can be found at the resources signposted below. Staff members whose partners have physically experienced pregnancy loss may also access counselling services, either through the EAP or external providers, for support during this time.

Maintaining Confidentiality

[Insert organisation name] is committed to protecting the privacy of all individuals affected by pregnancy loss. Personal and medical information will be kept confidential and shared only on a need-to-know basis, in compliance with data protection regulations (e.g., GDPR).

Returning to Work

Employees returning from leave will work with their manager to determine any necessary adjustments to workload or schedule, ensuring a smooth transition back to work.

Review

This policy will be reviewed annually and updated to reflect changes in best practice, legislation, and staff feedback.

Resources and Support

Pregnancy and Infant Loss Ireland: www.pregnancyandinfantloss.ie

Footnotes Appendices

- 15 Pregnancy and Baby Loss at Work, Sands, available at <https://www.sands.org.uk/sites/default/files/Sands-support-book-Pregnancy-Loss-Baby-Loss-at-work-bereavement-in-the-work-place.pdf>
- 16 Leave, University College Cork, available at <https://www.ucc.ie/en/hr/policies/leave/>
- 17 Kelly-Harrington R, Hennessy M, Leitao S, Donnelly M, Murray C, O'Sullivan M, Dalton-O'Connor C, Nuzum D, O'Donoghue K. [PLACES | Pregnancy Loss \(under 24 weeks\) in Workplaces: Informing Policymakers on Support Mechanisms](#). Dublin, Ireland: Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth; 2024.

Notes

Notes



Pregnancy Loss Research Group



www.ucc.ie/pregnancyloss



pregnancyloss@ucc.ie



Pregnancy Loss Research Group (PLRG)



[pregnancylossresearchgroup](https://www.instagram.com/pregnancylossresearchgroup)



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Pregnancy Loss Research Group