

## “The Sheet”

PRACTICAL TACTICS FOR  
NORTH STAR SUSTAINABILITY



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BEREAVEMENT POLICY  
BEST PRACTICES

### FIRST: A HUMAN APPROACH

Even the definition of bereavement leave can be cold and unfeeling when stated by a corporation. Instead, adopt a human definition. **Author Abby Miller calls bereavement leave “an employer’s compassionate response to the sadness caused by loss and the necessity to cope with personal challenges during this period.”** Your company’s bereavement leave policy is a place to show compassion, exhibit understanding and flexibility for the people who make your company successful.

### ENDING “FUNERAL LEAVE” POLICIES

Though many companies say they have bereavement policies in place, many of those policies are simply funeral leave policies. In truth, bereavement for many families does not begin immediately or end with a funeral. Depending on family preferences, cultural norms, and religious traditions, the bereavement process will look different for every employee experiencing loss. **These are the moments that matter in a workplace. How we show up for our employees during the most painful and traumatic periods of their lives is something they will never forget.**

### Immediate Action

Many companies qualify the types of relationships that are eligible for bereavement leave - immediate family members, for example. Take action now by removing these qualifications. Extend your bereavement policies to any employee’s loss of a significant individual in their life. No questions asked.

### A NOTE ON DECEPTION

A common concern about broadening bereavement leave is fear employees will abuse the policy. “How many grandmothers could possibly die in one year?”. But consider the greater good. For every employee who might exploit the benefit for his brother’s sister’s roommate’s mother’s death, there are hundreds of employees who will be grateful for the flexibility to grieve the death of a loved one with honor and flexibility.



From Angela Nino, CEO of Empathic Workplace, “Never compound grief by asking someone to prove they’re experiencing it.”



Employees have a right to privacy. It is not your company’s business whether someone was “like a father” to a person or “closer than a brother.” Many people experience significant relationships outside their family of origin.



## LEGISLATION AND REGULATION

The Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA), originally published in 1993, single-handedly changed the way employees are protected related to qualified medical and family leave reasons. Today, an onslaught of policies are in development globally related to bereavement, many of which may affect your company in the future.

Federal Employees in the U.S. are already entitled to up to 13 days annually for family care and bereavement and numerous Senators have indicated support for national legislation for similar coverage in the private sector. States including California, Illinois, Maryland, Minnesota, Oregon, and Washington require varying degrees of bereavement leave ranging from five days unpaid to two weeks paid.

Additionally, several cities have added policies related to family, sick, and bereavement leave. Adopting a more progressive bereavement policy now ensures your company is ahead of the regulation or legislation that could affect your teams in the near future.

## SAMPLE POLICY LANGUAGE

### ▶ Sample Policy Language:

When employees experience the death of a loved one, we offer a minimum of five paid days off. This time can be taken continuously or separately, understanding funeral or memorial arrangements, resolution of financial matters and personal mourning is not linear. If more time is required, we encourage employees to work with their direct managers to craft arrangements that meet their needs within our larger paid time off policies.

### ▶ Example from Indeed.com:

"If you are affected by a loss, please talk to your manager or supervisor. The company will support employees during the bereavement process and can help you with any questions you may have about the bereavement leave policy."



## Immediate Action

Ensure that pregnancy loss is included in your policies both related to bereavement leave and parental leave. Make this policy gender neutral to ensure any parent or potential parent has the space and flexibility to navigate this difficult time.

▶ Example from Reddit: Employees receive eight weeks of paid leave in the event of pregnancy loss.

▶ Don't stop at pregnancy loss when considering your company's policies around fertility and parental leave. The Skimm has created the #ShowUsYourLeave database, a roundup of 500+ companies leading the way by bringing more transparency and insight into paid leave policies in the private sector. Find resources at <https://www.theskimm.com/paid-family-leave-benefits>.