

Condolence and bereavement leave email template

Offer sympathy to a grieving employee and explain bereavement leave without making them ask.

Updated October 15, 2026. Written and reviewed by the HRTally Research Team.

When to use this template

When an employee loses someone, the first message should be human, not procedural. Express sympathy, tell them not to worry about work, and explain bereavement leave in a sentence or two so they don't have to look up the policy or ask. Then keep everything else, such as forms and coverage, for later or handle it quietly yourself.

Ask the employee what, if anything, they want shared with the team. Some people want colleagues to know, others want privacy. If you send a team note, keep it to what they approved. Your employee assistance program, if you have one, is worth mentioning, since grief often shows up weeks later.

Version 1: To the grieving employee

SUBJECT Thinking of you

Hi [Employee first name],

I was so sorry to hear about the loss of your [relationship, if they shared it]. Please accept my deepest sympathy, and that of everyone at [Company].

Please don't worry about work right now. You have [Number] days of paid bereavement leave, and you can take more time using [PTO or unpaid leave] if you need it. We will take care of the paperwork. You don't need to do anything.

[Coworker or manager name] is covering your work, so nothing needs your attention.

If it would help, our employee assistance program offers free, confidential support: [EAP phone and link].

Let me know if there's anything we can do, and what, if anything, you would like us to share with the team.

With sympathy,
[Manager or HR name]

Version 2: Team note, with the employee's permission

SUBJECT [Employee first name]

Hi team,

I'm sad to share that [Employee first name]'s [relationship] passed away [this week]. [First name] will be away until [Date or for the next little while].

[First name] has asked that [what they want, such as no calls, or messages are welcome]. [Any details they want shared about services or donations.]

[Coworker name] is covering [Work]. Please route questions to [him/her/them].

[Manager name]

Subject lines to try

- Thinking of you
- With sympathy
- [Employee first name]
- We're sorry for your loss
- Take the time you need

How to personalize it

- Lead with sympathy, not policy.
- Explain leave so the employee doesn't have to ask.
- Ask before sharing anything with the team.
- Check in again a few weeks after they return.

Mistakes to avoid

- Asking for proof of death in the first message.
- Telling the employee how long grief should take.
- Sharing details they didn't approve.
- Assuming which relatives count as close family.

Legal and compliance notes

No federal law requires bereavement leave for private employers, but several states do. California requires up to five days for employers with five or more employees, and Illinois and Oregon also have bereavement leave laws. Some paid sick leave laws allow sick time for bereavement. Apply your policy consistently, and define family broadly enough to reflect how employees actually live.

| When to send it

As soon as you hear the news. Send the team note only after the employee approves it. A short check-in a week after they return is a kind gesture many people remember.

| Before you hit send

- Dates, deadlines, and costs match the plan documents and carrier materials.
- Medical details stay between the employee and HR, not the manager or team.
- Required notices, such as FMLA forms or the Summary of Benefits and Coverage, are attached or scheduled.
- The employee knows exactly who to call, with a phone number.
- State leave programs and paid sick leave rules were checked for the employee's work location.

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