



Navigating Pregnancy and Infant Loss In The Workplace

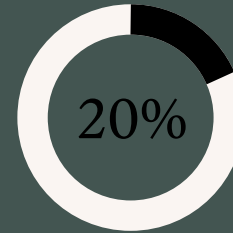
“I scheduled my appointment with my OB-GYN first thing in the morning so that I would be on time to work. By 9:00am, I had learned that I had an early pregnancy loss and found myself crying in the streets of Manhattan, absolutely devastated. Feeling completely shocked by such sudden news, I didn’t know what to do next—so, I attempted to go about my day. I went into auto-pilot where my immediate attention and energy was redirected to my job, doing the mental math to figure out if I had enough sick or vacation days to take off and head straight to my bed. Then, I wondered how to even share my unprocessed news with my employer when I wasn’t even planning on telling them I was pregnant so early on anyway. It would have made that day and the weeks following when my grief hit me in waves if I knew that my employer had the compassion, care and internal process to support me.”

- SIMMONE TAITT, FOUNDER AND CEO OF POPPY SEED HEALTH

When taking leave, the biggest obstacles employees experience is figuring out how to explain the purpose of the leave and a potential loss of income. Employees would rather take “sick days” than disclose to their employer that they have had a loss because of the shame, lack of clear HR protocols and fear of job loss.

THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS A WORKPLACE THAT HAS NOT BEEN TOUCHED BY PREGNANCY LOSS

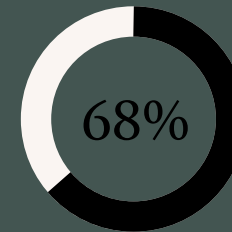
Neither employer nor Poppy Seed Health can save a person from the pain and grief of a loss, we can hold them through the ebbs and flows of it. 'Navigating Pregnancy and Infant Loss in the Workplace' is a guide created by trained advocates in loss care and by members of the Poppy Seed Health team who have experienced miscarriage and infant loss. It is designed to provide practical tools and language that can aid those who are in a person's care circle. Loss has been invisibilized by stigma and silence, so this guide offers ways to reach out, hold space for grief, strengthen support systems and to minimize harm. We focus on an idea called 'care literacy', which means developing a fluency in providing and receiving care. When more people know how to show up, more people will.



10-20% of known pregnancies end in miscarriage.



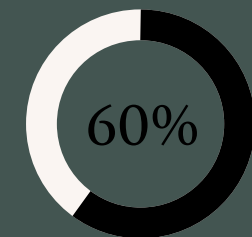
1-in-100 pregnancies end in stillbirth.



Nearly 68% of birthing people become pregnant after suffering a loss but contrary to popular belief subsequent pregnancies is not a protective factor to the anxiety and depression felt in their prior loss.



The CDC reports that Black women are twice as likely to have a stillbirth compared to Hispanic and white women.



More than 60% of partners feel the same level of grief, sadness and anxiety when there is a pregnancy loss.

EMBED CARE LITERACY INTO YOUR HR POLICIES AND COMPANY CULTURE

While we briefly touch upon the resource offering, we focus more on the human component of human resources.

Offering leave for pregnancy and infant loss is as standard as offering leave for unexpected individual or family events, such as death or illness of loved ones. And what's even more necessary is creating a safe and inclusive work environment that not only requires the leave to be included and established, but also equips employees with the tools and language to take the burden of labor—including emotional—off the individual who is experiencing the loss.

If you stay ready, you won't need to get ready. In other words: build loss care into your operations.

Audit your existing protocols, policies and training

From the moment a loss becomes a reality for the person experiencing it, it is a matter of minutes or hours before their mind and energy turns to their responsibilities, which can exacerbate the overwhelm of a loss. Repeating the scenario can be both triggering and retraumatizing for the employee, which can deter them from ever accessing the appropriate leave they deserve.

In these moments, how does your organization show up?

A bereavement policy that includes taking time away from work to process and cope with a pregnancy or infant loss is a valuable resource for financial peace-of-mind. Thus, the details matter and need to be as clear as possible. A great starting point is considering what it would look like to access for someone who is going through loss.

- How and when would they have learned about the policy?
 - Is this built into the on-boarding process for new employees?
 - For existing employees, is it shared through an email or newsletter from HR?
 - Are new policies posted in community rooms or bathrooms?
- How would they be able to access leave without disclosing information that's considered "too personal" for them?
 - Who is the best point of contact to ask questions and explain the policy in more detail?
- How do they get coverage for the work they will need to hand off to others? How is work delegated? What is the check-in process?
- Is your team or business literate in loss care?
 - Is there a specific group of people trained in how to communicate and hold space?
 - Do you send a care package?
 - Do you have emergency contacts if they are on site when they receive news?
 - Do you cover mental health services?

Train your human resource team specifically in loss care

As an employer or someone managing people, having a ‘script’ to reference when speaking with someone going through loss is essential for swift, appropriate and compassionate care.

You’ll want to acknowledge the loss, approach the scenario (phone call, email, in-person conversation) with empathy. Initiate a conversation about practical care, reassure them that this does not affect their standing as an employee. Remember that you do not need the details of what happened to support someone.

E.g. ‘Thank you for telling me, I cannot imagine what you are going through. If you would like, I can take charge in delegating your workload. Please let me know if there is anything else I can do. You are valued in this workplace and your wellbeing is a priority.’

Having at least one staff member who is trained in loss support is a good investment in employee wellbeing. What it comes down to is whether or not the employees feel safe to ask for support and what does that look like? Some aspects to consider are:

Is your HR department care literate? (e.g. using inclusive, caring language to communicate with employees as they experience loss)
Challenge assumptions. Is there language in any of your handbooks or materials that may alienate or shame someone going through this and deter them from asking for leave/support? Does your language include both pregnant individuals and their partners?

Providing training is a good way to equip your staff and organization with these skills. These are some organizations who can help:

- [Return to Zero: Hope](#)
- [The Institute for the Study of Birth, Breath and Death](#)

Remember that grief has its own timeline, it comes in waves and those waves might come when someone is sitting at their desk, on a video call or in a meeting. Many times we don’t see these painful losses that happen in pregnancy, IVF, adoption and surrogacy, but your commitment to care, compassion and comfort should be accessible to every person who works for you.

Create information packets tailored for your organization

When possible, offer mental and emotional health support resources. These can be in packets but also visible and accessible in the workplace (e.g. virtual systems, back of bathroom doors, community rooms). Here are some examples of resources for your employees:

- [Poppy Seed Health 24/7 Pregnancy and Grief Hotline](#)
- [The Motherhood Center](#)
- [Pregnancy After Loss Support PALS](#)
- [Return to Zero: Hope](#)

Advocate for loss support as an organization

The [Support for Loss Act](#) is past due for the millions of people who experience pregnancy and infant loss. These are the invisible losses that we may never know about, but that we should care about. By providing workplace support to our colleagues and peers who are navigating their own grief, healing and disappointment, your organization can help to destigmatize pregnancy loss while also holding space for your most valuable asset—your people.

- Use your company voice to advocate for national or state policy change.
 - Call your Senator or Representative to sign the Support and Loss Act.
- Advocate for pregnancy and infant support. If your organization does charitable giving, you can highlight and support the organizations who are doing the work. This sends a message to employees that this is important to the company.
 - March of Dimes
 - International Stillbirth Alliance
 - Supporting Mamas

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A word on advocacy and donations - they do not negate personal responsibility. We're not saying don't call your senators, we're saying your impact is felt by your close circle. You are not replaceable to them. Care literacy is a life skill and a professional qualification needed in order to manage people.