

Return-to-work Checklist

Guidance for managers, HR, and employees after bereavement leave

Overview

This document covers planning and preparing for a return to work after a loss. It is organized into three parts:

Section 1: For Managers

- ✓ Planning the return.
- ✓ The first months back.

Section 2: For HR

- ✓ Before the return date.
- ✓ In the first months back.

Section 3: For Employees

- ✓ A simple order to follow.
- ✓ Know your rights when returning.

 For fuller employee-facing guidance on leave entitlements, options when leave is not enough, and related FAQs, refer to: [Returning to work after a loss: a practical guide for employees.](#)

Section 1: For Managers

Planning the return:

- ☐ Discuss planned date and schedule.
- ☐ Temporary prioritization of work.
- ☐ Which meetings are essential in the first weeks and which can wait.
- ☐ How the employee wants their situation described to others.

The first months back:

- ☐ Check in at agreed intervals, keeping conversations short and practical.
- ☐ Watch workload and adjust if it remains too heavy.
- ☐ Signpost confidential supports (EAP, benefits, community resources) if the person seems stuck or increasingly overwhelmed.

Keep in mind: Managers do not need to act as counsellors. Their role is to create a stable, respectful environment and connect employees to the supports the organization already has.

 For more information, refer to: [Employer best practices to support employees with bereavement leave and loss in Canada.](#) [Returning to work after a loss: a practical guide for employees.](#) [Bereavement leave in Canada: what to ask your employer right away.](#) [What to say when telling work or school that someone has died: simple scripts and email templates.](#)

Section 2: For HR

Before the return date:

- ☐ When returning to work, an employee must be reinstated to the same position held before the leave, or to a comparable position if the original no longer exists.
- ☐ Make sure pay, benefits, and paperwork are handled without the employee needing to chase information.
- ☐ Before the return date, set up a brief conversation to discuss:
 - ☐ If more time is needed, explore medical leave, vacation time, or other options before the leave ends.

In the first months back:

- ☐ Check in at agreed intervals, keeping conversations short and practical.
- ☐ Watch workload and adjust if it remains too heavy.
- ☐ Signpost confidential supports (EAP, benefits, community resources) if the person seems stuck or increasingly overwhelmed.
- ☐ Make it easy to request temporary schedule or workload adjustments.
- ☐ Recognize that some key events and tasks happen months after the death (estate tasks, ceremonies, anniversaries). Allow leave to be taken in blocks or as individual days.

 For more information, refer to: [Employer best practices to support employees with bereavement leave and loss in Canada. Returning to work after a loss: a practical guide for employees. Bereavement leave in Canada: what to ask your employer right away. What to say when telling work or school that someone has died: simple scripts and email templates.](#)

Section 3: For Employees

A simple order to follow:

- ☐ Review the bereavement leave entitlement under the employment contract and applicable employment standards legislation.
- ☐ Confirm whether the leave is paid or unpaid, and for how long.
- ☐ Notify the employer in writing, noting the reason for the leave and its expected duration, as required.
- ☐ Before returning, have a brief conversation with a manager or human resources contact about what support would be helpful.
- ☐ Ask about a phased return if a gradual transition would be easier.
- ☐ Identify whether there are specific responsibilities or situations at work that may feel particularly hard at first.
- ☐ Identify whether a trusted contact at work can serve as a point of support if needed.
- ☐ If more time is needed, speak to both your manager and HR to explore medical leave, vacation time, or other options before the leave ends.

Keep in mind: There is no obligation to share personal details, but letting the employer know what kind of support would be helpful, or what would feel difficult, gives both sides a chance to prepare. Some employers offer a phased return informally, and others have formal accommodation processes.

Know your rights when returning.

Bereavement leave is job-protected under most Canadian employment legislation. When returning to work, an employee must be reinstated to the same position held before the leave, or to a comparable position if the original no longer exists. Seniority and length of service continue to accumulate during the leave.

For federally regulated employees, recent amendments to the Canada Labour Code added protections including the right to receive notice of employment opportunities during the leave, continued accumulation of pension, health, and disability benefits and seniority, and protection from reprisals, including a prohibition against considering the leave in promotion or training decisions.

If an employer penalizes an employee for taking bereavement leave, or fails to reinstate them appropriately, legal recourse is available through provincial employment standards bodies or the federal Labour Program, depending on the jurisdiction.

 For more information, refer to: [Returning to work after a loss: a practical guide for employees.](#)

Sources

1. [Employer best practices to support employees with bereavement leave and loss in Canada.](#)
2. [Returning to work after a loss: a practical guide for employees.](#)
3. [Bereavement leave in Canada: what to ask your employer right away.](#)
4. [What to say when telling work or school that someone has died: simple scripts and email templates.](#)

This article is for informational purposes and does not constitute legal advice. Entitlements vary by province and employer.