twin triplet support

Returning to Work for Employees

This leaflet is written with the help of bereaved parents who have sadly experienced the death of a baby or babies from a twin or triplet pregnancy.

It is for any parent who is returning to work after the loss of one or more of their twins or triplets.

It can be difficult to think about returning to work following the death of one or more of your twins or triplets. It might be after both twins or all of your triplets have died, or it might be that you are returning to work with a surviving twin or triplet(s) at home or you may still be pregnant with your surviving twin or triplet(s). The amount of time that you have had off will also vary according to your own specific situation, such as the gestation/age of the baby or babies that died, whether or not they lived at all, whether you are entitled to maternity/paternity or bereavement pay as well as how much time you would like to have off.

This returning to work information can also apply to parents who are returning to college, university or other study after the loss of their twins or triplets.

It is important to get as much help and support as you can and to put as much into place to make the transition as smooth as it can be. Please don't feel you are making a fuss or putting people out. Most people will understand that this is a difficult process and will want to help but may not know what you need.

We have put together some suggestions of things you might want to think about with the help of some of our Footprints Community based on their own experiences of returning to work.

KNOW WHAT YOUR RIGHTS ARE

Know what your rights are in terms of how long you can take off. This will be specific to your own particular situation so it is worth doing some reading and getting some advice about this before you talk to your employer. Some employers may not know exactly what you are entitled to depending on their experience. You can find more information here:

Working Families
Miscarriage, stillbirth and neonatal death - your rights at work.

Maternity Action
Miscarriage, stillbirth and neonatal death - rights to time off and pay.

ACAS
Parental Bereavement Leave

"I've actually just had a meeting to discuss my return to work as I was denied parental bereavement leave (I wanted to add onto my maternity) but HR refused to put the reasons why in writing. I sense it was the attitude 'at least one is alive' which we sadly come across far too much. I had to have my Union challenge this and thankfully I have now been awarded the parental bereavement leave."

CONSIDER WHAT IS RIGHT FOR YOU

Consider what is right for you - there is no one size fits all. The most important thing is that you feel as comfortable as possible with your return to help ease the transition. If you have some flexibility over how long you take off, take time to think about what is right for you. Some people are keen to get back to work, for others it can feel like a difficult process. It will depend on many things including your relationship with work and colleagues and the nature of your job.

"Thanks to a suggestion from a befriender I contacted my HR via email and requested parental bereavement leave at the end of my maternity leave (to be added just before I returned to work - as I went into labour so couldn't take it at the time). They applied it with no questions asked - but it is something that I had to request and it wasn't just added on for me."

PHASED RETURN

Think about having a phased return - even the most basic tasks can be draining when experiencing grief. A phased return could involve an initial reduction in hours, or a temporary change in tasks. Most employers would prefer you to come back to part of your role or to reduced hours compared to you staying off completely for longer.

If there are certain parts of your role that you are particularly worried about, talk to your manager about delaying these specific aspects until you are more settled. Equally, if there are particular parts of your role you really enjoy, see if there is scope to focus more on those so that returning to work can be part of a positive healing process.

It is important to think particularly about whether any parts of your job may be "triggering" for you - this may be of particular relevance for healthcare workers, for instance. Talk to your employer about this and see what adaptations they can make and whether there is any other support they can provide such as counselling.

"A phased return at work, if that is an option, helped me a lot, especially with my line of work and the stress involved."

"Returning to work was emotionally and physically draining after our babies died. Fortunately, my employer supppрted a phased return, which allowed me to balance my grief with a gentle return to working life"

DO YOU WANT COLLEAGUES TO BE INFORMED?

Think about how/if you want colleagues to be informed of your story before you return. Do you want to send a message yourself or would you prefer your manager to do it on your behalf? Who are the people who need to know? You may want to do it face-to-face on your return. This is a very personal choice but it is important to make a plan and involve anyone you need to rather than leaving it to chance.

"I asked HR to let key people know what had happened so I didn't have to keep explaining."

If you do share your story before you return, expect that someone will not have heard it and therefore may say some things that will upset you. Even if people know what has happened, it can be daunting to face people all in one go.

"I met with key colleagues 1:1 outside of the office in the weeks running up to my return so I didn't have to face everyone at the same time. My team had also relocated to a different office while I was away and so I arranged to visit the office space after hours with a colleague so that I wasn't also faced with unfamiliar surroundings."

However much planning and communicating you do beforehand, be prepared for people to say the wrong thing or to say nothing. There will be people who offer the support you need and it may not be the people you expect it would come from.

You may also find yourself getting upset or overwhelmed unexpectedly or some people may work in roles which have specific triggers (such as in healthcare or roles involving children and babies) and so it is important to think about how you might cope with these situations:

-Where can you go to take a short break if needed?

-Who are the key colleagues who you can talk to if you need to lean on someone?

"I think it's best not to have preconceived expectations that work colleagues will talk about what you have been through when you return or even acknowledge it."

"I spent so much time mentally preparing for questions or comments from others and how I would answer them. What I didn't prepare for was the deafening silence received by everyone too fearful to mention our son. It was so much more hurtful than the hurt anticipated in talking about him."

"Be prepared that people might blank you. I popped into my workplace to break the ice before I return in a few months and some people turn on their heels or completely ignore what's happened. It's so painful, but it will happen and I'm able to deal with it now."

"Some people might say unhelpful things like 'at least you got time with one before they died' or 'at least you got pregnant' or 'God had a plan for them.' They don't mean it to be cruel. They just don't have the experience of this terrible loss and say what they think is comforting."

BE GENTLE ON YOURSELF

Be gentle on yourself. Try and build in breaks to your working day and plan how you will spend these - for some, it will help to go and spend some time alone, for others you may want to meet a supportive colleague for a coffee or lunch so you are not alone. Make sure you look after yourself physically - eating and drinking will help to keep up your energy levels.

"I still cried at least once a week at work after I went back at 6 months post loss, for a further 6 months or thereabouts. Having somewhere I could escape to, which wasn't sitting in a toilet, was really important."

WHERE TO GO FOR ADVICE AND SUPPORT:

GP - You might want to talk to your GP about your concerns about returning to work and ask them to write to your employer on your behalf. This can help give weight to your requests for any phased return or adjustments.

Occupational health - if your employer has an occupational health department it is really important to ask for their involvement as it can make it easier for your manager to agree to adjustments if occupational health have requested them.

Line manager - depending on your relationship with your line manager, try to be as open about how you are feeling about your return to work and what could be helpful in terms of support. This will give them the best chance of being able to support you.

Employee assistance programme/counselling/coaching service - some employers have counselling or coaching support available that you may be able to access to support your return.

GUIDE YOUR COLLEAGUES

Guide your colleagues in talking about your baby or babies. This could be something you add into an initial message or an ongoing process. It will be an individual choice but people won't necessarily know what to say or do and may be glad of the guidance.

"I brought in cakes each year on their birthday. I find it helpful to guide others with what I would like them to say as well as when I would like to talk about my babies."

"I asked a colleague who is a counsellor to meet with the team that I manage in advance of my return so that they had an opportunity to talk about the situation, ask any questions and talk about how they would handle it to avoid them feeling anxious about it. I spoke to her on the phone beforehand so that she could get an understanding of my preferences etc. They found it really useful and were able to process some of their emotions and anxiety before seeing me."

Ask about other support available to you. Many employers will have support available for staff such as counselling, coaching or an employee assistance programme. It may be really useful to have someone impartial such as this to talk to during your transition back to work.

SPECIFIC CIRCUMSTANCES - RETURNING TO WORK WHILST PREGNANT

You may be returning to work whilst pregnant - this could be an existing pregnancy where you have lost one of your twins/triplets or it could be a new pregnancy after a period of maternity leave. It is important to talk through this with your employer and involve HR and occupational health if you have it. You may have specific concerns related to the pregnancy due to your loss or may be receiving additional care during your pregnancy. You are likely to have anxiety around the pregnancy. It is important that you discuss your concerns and rights with your employer, that they do a risk assessment for you and make any reasonable adjustments.

"When I returned to work I was 15 weeks pregnant with my rainbow baby. I told my manager (and some trusted colleagues) as I needed her support with my phased return request which was impacted by the pregnancy but I did not want most people to know as I couldn't cope with talking about it yet. I was very anxious during this pregnancy due to what had happened in my twin pregnancy and so as well as reduced hours, one of the adjustments they made for me was to provide me with a parking permit so I didn't have to travel on a bus into work and could theoretically leave at any time to get to a hospital if needed."

"I returned to work after the loss of one of my twins while I was still pregnant with my surviving twin. My employer wasn't keen to give me time off as they considered it to be 'preferential treatment'. After I challenged this with HR I was given some time off. My advice would be to really push your employer for acknowledgement and compassionate leave as you have a right to time to grieve your loss."

SPECIFIC CIRCUMSTANCES - RETURNING TO WORK WHILST CARING FOR SURVIVING TWIN OR TRIPLET(S)

When you return to work with a surviving twin or triplet(s) they may still have lots of hospital or other service appointments such as physiotherapy. It is best to have a conversation with your employer as soon as you return to pre-warn them that you may need some time to attend these appointments. Although there is no legal right to time off for these appointments, employers have a 'duty of care' towards your health and wellbeing. There may be different leave options that you can apply for such as 'special leave' or 'parental leave' so speaking to HR about this early on may be helpful.

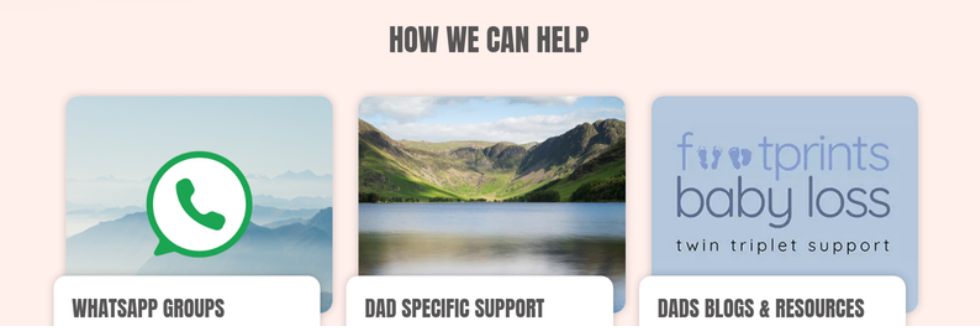
Talking about your survivor with work colleagues is a personal experience: you may choose not to speak about your experience or you may want people to be able to talk to you about your twins/triplets. You may find that if you talk about your survivor as a multiple then your colleagues will feel more comfortable to speak to you about your twins or triplets and your journey. Don't be surprised when people only ever mention your survivor(s) as though they were a singleton or twin pregnancy. Most of the time they do not mean any offence but they may not want to upset you or know what to say.

"I always have conversations with colleagues about my twins and update them on the progress of my survivor. I have found that by having these open conversations my colleagues have started to ask questions about my angel and are more comfortable to mention him to me - it's like guiding the conversation to let them know what I am happy to discuss. Also because of this I find that they are more supportive on important days such as birthdays and also very proactive when I fundraise in my son's memory."

A NOTE FOR DADS/NON-BIRTHING PARTNERS

The advice above is designed to be relevant to all parents who have lost twins or triplets. However, it can often be assumed that dads (or non-birthing partners) don't need as much support. They may also feel less deserving of the support. Be kind to yourself, you are grieving too and you are entitled to time off and support.

Find out more about how Footprints Baby Loss supports dads.



"Please don't avoid me and do include me in conversations. Try to understand that I will need more time to focus and complete tasks initially." Dad of one twin that died.

"Offering informal opportunities to catch up through a 3rd space (outside of work or home) would make me feel supported by my colleagues. Something like asking for a coffee or walk. Offer more than once." Dad of triplets where one of the babies died.

"My husband's work was very understanding of him taking time off. They gave him a break in his work and allowed extra time. He didn't get bereavement leave, but his boss told him to take as much time as he needed and they would figure it out."
Mum of twins that both died.

Other links you might find helpful

www.pregnantthenscrewed.com/advice-services/

Find out more

www.maternityaction.org.uk/advice/redundancy-during-pregnancy-and-maternity-leave/

Find out more

www.equalityadvisoryservice.com/

Find out more

www.valla.uk

Find out more

Our Support

At Footprints Baby Loss charity we offer peer-to-peer support which can be incredibly helpful to talk through transitions such as returning to work with someone who has been there too www.footprintsbabyloss.org

Our support is provided by those who have had firsthand experience of twin or triplet loss. We understand the value of having a safe space to be able to communicate with someone who has been through something similar, and provide a kind, caring and inclusive approach with our bereavement services.

Thank you to our Footprints families for their contributions to the leaflet. You may also wish to read our 'Returning to work - For Employers and Colleagues' leaflet.

footprintsbabyloss.org
enquiries@footprintsbabyloss.org
&in search FootprintsBabyLoss
@footprintsbabyloss
@footprintsbabyloss

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