

RETURNING TO WORK AFTER CHILD LOSS

Carrying Grief Into a World That Keeps Moving

Work | Grief | Boundaries | Support

Returning to work after the death of a child can feel surreal, exhausting, or simply impossible to imagine. Workplaces often move quickly, while your life has changed in a way that cannot be left at the door. You may struggle to concentrate, need more breaks, worry about questions from coworkers, or feel unsure how much to share. There is no one right way to return. Going slowly, setting boundaries, and asking for support can help you find your way through one day at a time.

Returning to work does not mean leaving your child or your grief behind.

1 THERE IS NO PERFECT RETURN

- You may not feel ready, even when you have to go back.
- A return can be gradual if that is available to you.
- Your capacity may be different for a while.
- Take one workday at a time.

2 THE GRIEF BRAIN AT WORK

- Grief can affect concentration, memory, and decision-making.
- Simple tasks may take more energy than usual.
- Write things down and use reminders when you need to.
- This is not a failure; it is part of grief.

3 DECIDING WHAT TO SHARE

- You decide how much coworkers need to know.
- A short response can be enough: "I am grieving a loss."
- You can ask a supervisor or trusted coworker to help.
- Privacy is a valid boundary.

4 PREPARING FOR QUESTIONS

- Some people may not know what to say.
- You can prepare a phrase for difficult questions.
- It is okay to say, "I cannot talk about that today."
- You do not owe anyone your whole story.

5 BUILDING IN BREAKS

- Plan brief moments to step outside, breathe, or sit quietly.
- Keep water, tissues, or a grounding object nearby.
- A hard moment does not mean you are doing work wrong.
- Small pauses can help you get through the day.

6 HANDLING TRIGGERS

- A coworker's pregnancy, a child-related event, or an anniversary can be painful.
- Notice what situations may feel especially tender.
- Give yourself permission to step away or ask for support.
- You can protect your heart at work.

7 ASKING FOR SUPPORT

- Talk with HR, a supervisor, or someone you trust if it feels safe.
- Ask about flexibility, time off, or adjusted workload.
- Practical support can make a real difference.
- You do not have to prove how hard this is.

8 BEING GENTLE WITH YOURSELF

- Some days you may do less than you hoped.
- Grief takes energy that others cannot always see.
- Celebrate the small steps: showing up, taking a break, going home.
- Your worth is not measured by productivity.

A GENTLE REMINDER

You are allowed to work at a different pace while carrying a loss this profound.

