

Miscarriage, Stillbirth and Infertility: Managers Guidance

This guidance should be read in conjunction with the University's Miscarriage, Stillbirth and Infertility Policy.

Managers play an important role in promoting wellbeing amongst our staff and taking time to understand how a team member may be affected by a miscarriage, stillbirth or infertility is extremely important. This guidance has been developed to help managers provide practical and appropriate support to an employee affected by:

- 'Miscarriage' includes ectopic or molar pregnancy (loss of a pregnancy before 24 weeks gestation).
- 'Stillbirth' is when a baby is born dead after 24 weeks of pregnancy
- 'Infertility' is when an individual cannot conceive despite wanting a child

Everyone's experience of miscarriage, stillbirth or infertility will be different – some people may feel they can continue to work as normal while others may require support. Partners, grandparents and other close relatives might also be affected and need support.

An individual who has experienced a miscarriage or stillbirth or is being treated for infertility may feel some or all of the following:

- Sad and tearful
- Shocked
- Anger at the unfairness of it
- Jealous of others who are pregnant or have babies
- Guilty in case they might be the cause
- A sense of loss
- Stressed and anxious

In addition to the above, they may experience flashbacks or have nightmares or trouble sleeping and in some cases, may suffer PTSD.

Talking about miscarriage, stillbirth and infertility

In order to support individuals going through any of these situations, managers are advised to take a personal approach. Unless the individual requests otherwise, it's important to acknowledge what has happened and not ignore it. Conversations should take place privately and could involve the following:

- Asking simple questions

- Allowing the individual to explain in their own words and in their own time (allow time for silences)
- Being ready for strong displays of emotions
- Not interrupting or give an opinion (unless asked for)
- Showing empathy and don't make assumptions
- Offering comfort and support

The following questions may help to start the conversation:

1. How are you feeling?
2. What, if anything, would you like your colleagues/the team to know?
3. Do you need any time off work?
4. Do you need any changes to your work tasks or schedule?
5. What do you feel would help right now?
6. What other support do you have?

Avoid using phrases or expressions which, whilst well-meaning, can be perceived as dismissive or trivialising. Things like, "look on the bright side", "at least..", or "everything happens for a reason" should be avoided.

Practical support

If the individual begins to miscarry in work, they may experience one or more of the following symptoms:

- bleeding – which may be very heavy
- abdominal pain
- dizziness, fainting or collapse

The individual may be upset, scared or embarrassed and may need privacy and support. It may be necessary to offer assistance in terms of transport home or an ambulance to hospital and to call their partner, relative or friend.

Support whilst working and returning to work

Whilst at work, it's normal for an individual to struggle to concentrate and this may change from day to day. Sadness and feelings of loss are to be expected and those going through fertility treatment may be in a constant state of anxiety.

Individuals should be encouraged to take some time out, go for a walk or coffee with a colleague and this also goes for those family members or close relatives affected by the event.

If a member of staff has been absent from work following a miscarriage or stillbirth, managers should arrange to meet with them before they return to discuss any specific needs such as any workplace adjustments or time off for hospital appointments etc.

An individual has the right to keep miscarriage, stillbirth and infertility treatment private so a discussion should take place about what, if anything, they want colleagues to know about the situation.

Support and Information

Counselling Solutions Northwest – the University’s self-referral confidential counselling service

https://www.hope.ac.uk/media/gateway/staffgateway/personneldocuments/Six_Ways_Staff_Counselling_Leaflet_Sept%202022.pdf

Miscarriage Association

<https://www.miscarriageassociation.org.uk/>

Tommy’s

<https://www.tommys.org/pregnancy-information/planning-a-pregnancy/fertility-and-causes-of-infertility>

Ectopic Pregnancy Trust

<https://ectopic.org.uk/>

Maternity Action

<https://maternityaction.org.uk/>

NHS IVF Support

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/ivf/support/>

Fertility Network UK

<https://fertilitynetworkuk.org/>

Government Baby Loss Certificate

<https://www.gov.uk/request-baby-loss-certificate>