

MISCARRIAGE AND TERMINATION GUIDANCE FOR STAFF AND MANAGERS



1. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

Everyone will experience the ending of a pregnancy differently, and it's important not to make any assumptions about how people feel or how they want to be treated. Beyond the range of physical implications, some women and men will experience ongoing emotional issues, whereas others will not have the same feelings. Some people may feel that they can continue to work as normal within a short period of time, while others may require more support.

You may have your own experiences or opinions about the impact of miscarriage or termination. For instance, you may be a manager with your own experience of a pregnancy ending or an expectant parent managing someone that has experienced a miscarriage or termination. If this is the case, you may need to speak to your own line manager or HR for advice.

For further information on supporting employees there is information available from sources listed at the end of the guidance.

2. GUIDANCE FOR MANAGERS

Colleagues who have experienced a miscarriage or termination must be able to rely on the support of the University. This guidance aims to help managers provide the appropriate practical and emotional support to an employee or employees affected by a termination or miscarriage. The word 'miscarriage' here is used inclusively to also cover issues such as ectopic or molar pregnancies.

The guidance specifically relates to the ending of a pregnancy before 24 weeks gestation.

The ending of a pregnancy can be sudden, but it can also take place over a period of time. For example, a routine scan may reveal an unexpected difficult diagnosis, but the physical ending of the pregnancy not occur until later on. The physical symptoms of a termination or miscarriage will vary from person to person, and are often related to the length of gestation, and the type of medical intervention. It is important that managers are aware of this variation in order to offer appropriate support.

If a miscarriage begins at work

A miscarriage may happen suddenly at work, although you may not know that an employee is pregnant. This is because employees are not obliged to inform their employers of their pregnancy until 15 weeks before the estimated due date.¹

If an employee suspects that she has started to miscarry, she may have bleeding, severe abdominal pain, and may feel faint or collapse. In addition, she may be very distressed and panicked, embarrassed and frightened.

You can help by ensuring that she has quick access to a toilet, and you may need to help her by calling her preferred contact or colleague to assist her in getting home or to a hospital or a first aid room. In severe cases, you may need to call an ambulance.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/working-when-pregnant-your-rights>

If an employee is informed that their partner or close relative is having a miscarriage, they may need to leave work at short notice to provide practical and emotional support.

Respecting confidentiality

You will need to ensure that the details of your colleague's absence are kept confidential to respect their privacy, especially as they might not want others to know the details.

Recording leave and absence

Time off during and after a termination or miscarriage is protected as 'pregnancy-related' leave. Any sick leave should be recorded as sickness absence in the 'pregnancy-related' category. This period of sick leave will not count towards sickness absence trigger points.

For periods of absence longer than 28 days, the colleague will need to obtain a Fitness for Work statement from her doctor or health professional at the hospital.

If the employee is a partner rather than the person who has experienced the termination or miscarriage, paid compassionate leave of up to three days may be taken.

While your colleague is off work

As with any other colleague off sick leave, it is essential to offer your support by staying in touch. However, while it is important to let them know you are there, try not to add pressure to return to work before they feel ready.

If appropriate, it may be helpful to ask them whether they would like colleagues to know or whether they wish for this to be kept confidential. This is their choice, and their privacy must be respected.

It may be helpful to remind them of the support organisations that are available (details at the end of the guidance). They may also contact our Employee Assistance provider, PamAssist, for counselling and support.

Facilitating return to work

When an employee is ready to return to work, the line manager should meet with the returning employee to discuss any specific needs.

This might include a temporary workplace adjustment, which enables a person to work from home or have a phased return to work. This can be particularly important if an employee has ongoing hospital appointments to attend. It might also be challenging for someone who has suffered a termination or miscarriage to work closely with or near a pregnant colleague or has recently given birth. If this is the case, it may also be worth exploring alternative arrangements or allowing the employee to work in a different location in the short term.

Talking about miscarriage or termination

It's important to be guided by the individual as to whether or not, and how to acknowledge their pregnancy ending. Some staff will want the loss acknowledged, but others will not. Do not make assumptions, for all types of pregnancy ending people will have different emotional responses.

For some, the stigma and silence around miscarriage and termination may make it difficult for colleagues to tell their managers what has happened or discuss what happens next with work. At an appropriate point, the line manager or trusted colleague should speak to the colleague about what they would like others at work to know about their situation. This type of contact can help your colleagues understand what has happened, what the effects might be on the team member, and how to be supportive. It will also make it easier for the team member to speak to colleagues when they return to work. If, however, the employee does not wish to share this information, their wishes should be respected, and they should not be made to feel pressured in any way.

The Miscarriage Association has more information on [talking about miscarriage in the workplace](#). Colleagues may also find it helpful to look at the Miscarriage Association's [information for colleagues](#) and the leaflet [Supporting someone you know](#).

3. GUIDANCE FOR EMPLOYEES WHO EXPERIENCE A PREGNANCY ENDING

The university recognises that this is a difficult time for employees that have experienced a pregnancy ending of this nature. There are links to charities and support groups you may find helpful at the end of this document.

Sick Leave and Sick Pay

Sick leave after a pregnancy ending is protected as 'pregnancy related' and will be recorded separately. It will not count towards any sick leave 'triggers'.

You can self-certify for seven days. After this, you will need to get a 'fit note' or Fitness for Work statement from your GP that confirms your absence is pregnancy-related. In addition, your sick pay (including Statutory Sick Pay) will be paid in accordance with the Sickness Absence Policy. Please refer to the Sickness Absence Policy for further information regarding paid sickness absences.

Returning to work

Before you return to work, your manager will contact you to arrange a meeting to discuss your return and any support you need. They may also recommend referring you to Occupational Health to seek further advice about how best to support you. This support may include a phased return or other reasonable adjustments recommended by OH or that you feel may be helpful.

Confidentiality

You have a right to keep your pregnancy ending private if you choose. However, your manager will ask you what, if anything, you would like other people at work to know.

4. GUIDANCE FOR EMPLOYEES WHO ARE PARTNERS

If you are the partner of someone who has experienced a physical loss, you may take up to three days of compassionate leave. Please refer to the compassionate leave policy for further information.

5. COUNSELLING SERVICE

Employee Assistance Programme and Counselling Service

All employees of Aston University have access to [PamAssist](#), an Employee Assistance Programme that offers free, confidential advice and support across a range of issues, both personal and work-related. They are available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

You can make use of them by calling 0800 882 4102 or on the [internet](#) (Username: **Aston** / Password: **Aston1**).

More information on PAM Assist can be found by watching these [videos](#) or via these [slides](#).

6. HELPFUL LINKS

Aston University Policies and Procedures

- [Dependency Care, Compassionate and Bereavement Policy](#)
- Flexible working - [Policy](#) | [Form](#)
- Flexible working policy
- [Sickness Absence Guidance](#)

External support

- **Miscarriage Association**
- www.miscarriageassociation.org.uk
- 01924200799
- info@miscarriageassociation.org.uk
- Information and support to help you through a miscarriage, ectopic pregnancy or molar pregnancy.

- **Citizens Advice Bureau**
- www.citizensadvice.org.uk
- (search for your local office on this link)
- Free and confidential advice on benefits, work, and family

- **ARC (Antenatal Results and Choices)**
- <https://www.arc-uk.org/>
- 020 7713 7486
- info@arc-uk.org
- Non-directive information and support before, during and after antenatal screening

- **Ectopic Pregnancy Trust**
- www.ectopic.org.uk
- 020 7733 2653
- Information and support for ectopic pregnancy

- **Maternity Action**
- www.maternityaction.org.uk
- (find information and appropriate telephone numbers on this link)
- Information on rights and benefits around pregnancy, pregnancy loss and maternity

- **Abortion Talk**
- <https://www.abortiontalk.com/>
- +44 (0) 333 0909266 (7.00pm to 10pm)
- Information and support on abortion

- **Sands**
- www.sands.org.uk
- 0808 164 3332
- helpline@sands.org.uk
- Information and support for stillbirth and neonatal death

- **Working families**
- www.workingfamilies.org.uk
- 0300 012 0312
- advice@workingfamilies.org.uk
- Advice for working families via website and helpline

- **Mind**
- www.mind.org.uk
- Information on mental health support, including Wellness Action Plans and reducing stress at work