

# Bumped Out:

Why pregnancy and parenting support in the workplace must be a priority



# Tommy's

The pregnancy and baby charity

## Introduction

**Across every organisation, people bring their whole lives to work – the good, the bad, the unexpected. Yet one of life's most significant moments, becoming a parent, is still not consistently supported in the workplace.**

At Tommy's, we wanted to better understand people's experiences of pregnancy and parenting at work. In partnership with Think Stylist, we explored the realities of pregnancy and baby loss, as well as the experience of returning to work after birth and parental leave.

By listening to a broad range of first-hand experiences, we've uncovered where workplaces are making a real difference, the positive impact of meaningful support, and where gaps can leave lasting effects.

The findings are striking: Fewer than half of women felt well supported when they returned after having a baby. Shockingly, 1 in 10 women leave work because they lack support after pregnancy loss or baby loss. The human impact is profound, and so is the business cost – from lost expertise and disrupted teams to the expense of replacing talent at a time when retention has never mattered more.

Individual managers often care deeply and want to help. But goodwill alone is not enough. This report sets out what effective support looks like and how organisations can move from good intentions to meaningful action. Because getting this right is not just the right thing to do – it is a business imperative.

**No one should have to navigate pregnancy, loss, or early parenthood without compassionate, reliable support at work. Yet for many, that support still isn't consistently there. This report shows that while many organisations have strong foundations in place with managers often demonstrating genuine care, empathy, and a clear desire to help, goodwill and kindness alone are simply not enough.**

**We need employers to recognise and address gaps in their approach to pregnancy and loss so that everyone can benefit from consistent, fit-for-purpose workplace support around one of life's most defining moments.**

Kath Abrahams, Chief Executive, Tommy's



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## Executive summary

**This report highlights the lasting impact of gaps in workplace support during pregnancy, loss and early parenthood.**

Support is inconsistent. While many individuals describe compassionate managers, this is often informal rather than embedded in clear policies and practices.

Among those who experienced loss while working, nearly 1 in 3 (29%) considered leaving, with 9% doing so. Most (89%) told someone at work, but only a quarter (25%) informed HR, and 1 in 20 told no one, often due to fears about career impact. Over half (51%) would have benefited from workload adjustments, yet only 24% were offered them.

Support also drops after returning to work. While 66% felt supported during pregnancy, this falls to 46% post-return. Over half (52%) said their mental wellbeing worsened, and just 2% reported no challenges.

Structural gaps persist: only 3% said their organisation offers training on pregnancy or baby loss, and 31% believed their employer has no relevant policies.

Too many people are navigating these experiences without consistent support-impacting wellbeing, confidence and retention. Employers must go further, moving beyond goodwill to create workplaces grounded in clarity, compassion and consistency.

### What we heard

Support during pregnancy, loss and return to work is inconsistent. How supported someone feels depends far more on their individual manager than on clear workplace policies.

As a result, women's experiences vary widely at critical moments, shaping wellbeing, engagement and employee retention.



### Work and retention are affected:

**47%**

of those returning after birth said poor support made them less likely to stay and **44%** said their ability to perform was impacted.

### Wellbeing suffers:

**52%**

said their mental wellbeing worsened after returning to work following birth.

### Women leave:

**1 in 10**

employees left their job because of their experience of pregnancy loss or baby loss.

## Creating workplaces where people feel safe to share.

Together, these stats reveal a concerning gap between employee needs and workplace support.



### Key findings

Around  
**4 in 10**

around 40% described their workplace as 'closed' or unsupportive when talking about pregnancy, loss and early parenthood.

**46%**

only 46% felt well-supported when they returned after having their baby.

**25%**

only a quarter informed HR of their baby loss.

### Why this matters

Pregnancy and returning to work are defining moments in women's working lives. Losing a baby during pregnancy or after birth is devastating. Getting support right is not only the right thing to do; it also has a direct impact on retention, performance and long-term workforce stability.

For organisations, this presents a clear opportunity to move from inconsistent, individual-led support to approaches that are structured, visible and applied consistently. This can strengthen both employee experience and business outcomes.





## Research methodology

This research was conducted independently by Think Stylist, with funding and support from Grayling UK and YMU. It is based on a survey of 1,001 people, all of whom were in work at the time they experienced pregnancy, baby loss or a return to work after birth.

Where individuals had experienced more than one of these situations, they were asked to reflect on the experience they felt most able to talk about. Everyone who took part answered questions about their employer's policies, culture and support, with opportunities to write in their own words.

The survey included 39 partners, who reflected on how their own employer supported them.

**1,001**  
people

**39**  
partners

Research fieldwork took place between 25 February and 31 March 2026, using an online survey of UK adults aged 18 and over. Participants were drawn from the Think Stylist research panel, its wider database, and the Tommy's community.

Sample size and diversity allow for meaningful analysis across different experiences and demographic groups, helping to identify consistent themes and areas where change is needed.

Household income bands are defined as follows:

- Lower income households: £0–£49,999
- Middle income households: £50,000–£99,000
- Higher income households: £100,000 or more

Industry groupings are defined as follows:

- **Industrial and Technical:** agriculture, forestry and fishing; manufacturing; utilities; construction / engineering; transport and storage; motor trade; sciences
- **Corporate, Professional and Commercial:** finance and insurance; legal; sales and purchasing; recruitment / human resources; IT; property
- **Creative, Media and Communications:** Information and Communication (advertising, marketing, media, publishing); arts; entertainment; music; sport and recreation
- **Public Sector and Community:** local and national government; medical, health and social welfare; education; armed services, police and fire services; charity and NGO sectors

## Pregnancy loss and baby loss: When support depends on people, not systems

### Confiding in work is not a straightforward decision

Most women (**89%**) did tell someone at work about their loss, although this tended to be at an individual level rather than through organisational channels such as HR. Most often they confided in their line manager (**84%**), with fewer telling wider colleagues (**42%**) and only a quarter involving HR (**25%**).

For those who didn't tell anyone at work (**11%**), this was largely driven by privacy and self-protection:

**61%**

felt the loss was a private matter

**48%**

were worried it might affect their career

**38%**

wanted to avoid difficult or intrusive questions

**18%**

were concerned about stigma

For some, whether to speak or to remain silent carried real personal and professional risk. Others described being treated differently once colleagues knew, facing silence or isolation on their return to work.



I've had 3 losses... I asked my manager at the time to tell work colleagues for me. When I went back to work after 3 months, colleagues who I thought I was really close to treat me so differently now. 2 have never asked how I am and actively avoided conversations with me.

## Support varies widely and is often inconsistent

Among those who told work about their loss, experiences of support were divided and not guaranteed. **52% of respondents felt support was limited, inconsistent or insufficient in light of what they were going through.**

Some women reflected on the contrast between their own treatment and the support their partner received at work. Where partners were met with understanding and flexibility, it highlighted what good support can look like and how stark the absence of that support felt in their own workplace.

Many women said better support would have made a real difference for them, noting the impact that understanding, clearer organisational backing or simple support from colleagues could have had at the time.

Overall, the issue was not a lack of willingness to share what had happened, but the absence of support women could rely on once they had done so.

### In moments like these, women rarely turn first to HR - they turn to their manager.

This means the support someone receives often depends less on policy and more on the person sitting across from them.

**81%**

felt supported by their manager

**68%**

felt supported by their colleagues

**59%**

felt supported by their organisation

When managers got it right, it made a meaningful difference. Empathy, respect for privacy and flexibility helped women feel supported and made returning to work easier.



I was a teacher in a primary school and the support was awful. I miscarried on the Sunday and made work aware immediately. I was then rung on the Monday 3 times to ask when I was coming back and I said I don't know. I was told this was massively inconvenient as there was no one to cover me. Fast forward a few days and I ended up in hospital, very poorly with my miscarriage as my baby had died a few weeks before. It was a missed miscarriage. I was rung in hospital to ask when I would be back and even when I explained I was in hospital there was little sympathy. I suffered with retained products for a few weeks as my body really wasn't letting go and I was rung most days asking when I was back despite having a sick note. When I went back to work after only 4 weeks, I was told I could forget about it now and move on now I was back at work. All in all a terrible support system.



My line manager was invaluable... she made it much easier to return to work.

Too often, whether someone feels supported comes down to chance, who their manager is, what they know and what they feel confident to offer. **Empathy is common, structure is not.**

Understanding from managers was the most frequently reported form of support (73%), followed by paid compassionate leave (50%) and the option to work from home (50%).

By contrast, more embedded or systemic forms of support were far less common:

**24%** Workload adjustments

**18%** Access to counselling

**3%** Access to a private space

But experiences were not always consistent. Some women described a lack of sensitivity, poor judgement or breaches of trust - making an already difficult time even harder to navigate.

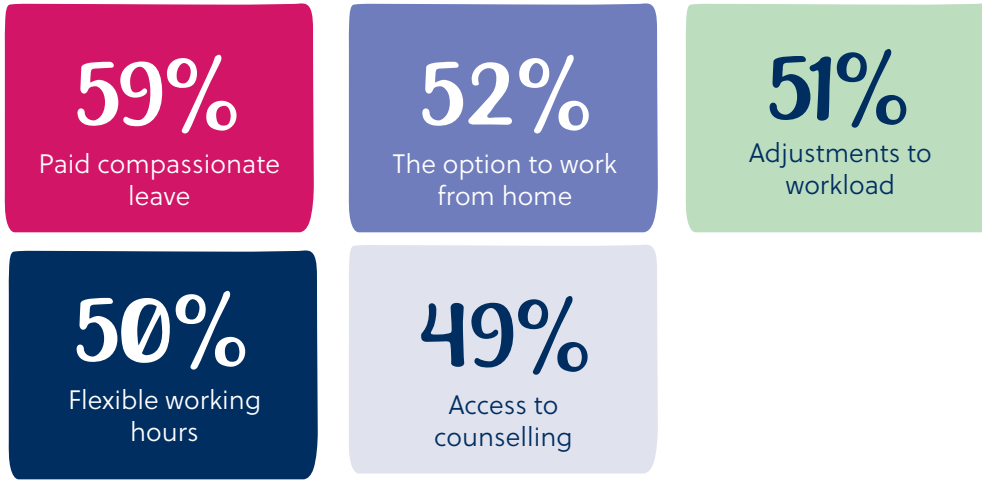


**I told her I was losing another baby and she said, "Again? Put your sunglasses on so no one sees you crying."**

Access to support was also unequal. Those in higher-income households were significantly more likely to access flexible arrangements such as working from home (63% compared with 17%) and paid time off for appointments (55% compared with 26%). Public sector and community-based roles reported lower access to flexibility overall, reflecting the constraints of frontline work.

### What women need after a loss - and the structural gaps

When asked what would have made the biggest difference, built-in, practical support was prioritised over goodwill alone. Outside of managerial understanding (53%), the most commonly requested forms of support were:



Comparing what women wanted with what they received shows that the largest gaps were structural rather than relational:

Support Type	Wanted	Received	Gap
Access to a counselling service	49%	18%	-31%
Adjustments to workload	51%	24%	-27%
Signposting to specialist external organisations	32%	8%	-24%
Adjustments to work tasks / duties	45%	22%	-23%
Access to a private space	18%	3%	-15%
Flexibility of working hours	50%	36%	-14%
Referral to occupational health	22%	9%	-13%
Understanding from my manager	53%	73%	+20%

Where structured support was missing, individuals were sadly forced to negotiate adjustments at an already challenging time.

“My job required long periods of standing which I was finding difficult to do so requested a role where I could sit. This was denied. Clear communication about available policies, such as sick leave, compassionate leave, or occupational health referral, would have provided reassurance and reduced additional stress at a very vulnerable time.

### Grief doesn't follow a timeline

Many women told us that support faded just as they needed it most. Initial sympathy often disappeared within weeks, even though the emotional impact of loss was often only beginning to unfold. Some felt an unspoken expectation to return to "normal", while their grief continued in ways others could not always see.



I am a paediatrician and I have found this excruciating from a returning to work perspective. I work on the same corridor as the pregnancy assessment unit / labour ward / postnatal ward



Women think you take a couple of weeks to physically heal and then you're fine, without realising you've lost your child and that grief will appear on and off in the future.

For some, the workplace itself could make that grief even harder to carry - from child-facing roles and clinical settings to pregnancy announcements or being surrounded by pregnant colleagues, everyday moments could become painful reminders of what they had lost.



## When support falls short, the consequences are real

Our findings show a clear pattern: support following baby loss often depends on individual managers rather than consistent workplace systems. The impact is significant for both women and organisations.

**1 in 10**

respondents left  
their job because of  
inadequate support.

For employers, this comes at a considerable cost – replacing an employee in the UK is estimated to cost £25,000–£30,000\* once recruitment, onboarding, training and lost productivity are taken into account.

*\*Employment Lawyer Today, Understanding Employee Turnover Costs: The Real Price of Losing Staff, April 2026*

The findings highlight where support falls short. However, where organisations put the right structures in place, the impact can be significantly different.

### Hannah Meredith, Wellbeing Benefits Consultant, Bupa

Bupa, which employs around 87,000 women globally and around 25,000 for UK and Ireland, partnered with Tommy's to better support colleagues navigating pregnancy, fertility challenges, baby loss and early parenthood. The aim was to help managers feel more confident handling sensitive conversations, provide more consistent support and create a workplace where women felt safe to share their experiences.

Through Tommy's Pregnancy and Parenting at Work programme, employees, managers and HR teams received expert guidance and practical training. Feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, helping colleagues feel seen and supported, while giving managers greater confidence and clearer tools to respond sensitively.

Since introducing the programme, Bupa has seen greater openness, empathy and psychological safety, alongside more consistent support and earlier intervention. Most importantly, it has helped normalise conversations around pregnancy, loss, fertility and parenthood, creating a more compassionate and inclusive workplace.



## Returning to work after having your baby: Where support can fall away

### Support is strongest during pregnancy

Many women felt well supported during pregnancy, with **66%** saying they had the flexibility and understanding they needed. Expectations were often clearer and practical adjustments more readily put in place.

Common forms of support included:

**88%**

Flexibility to attend appointments

**60%**

Understanding from managers

**60%**

Permission to work from home

**51%**

Support from colleagues

### But support often drops during return to work planning

The biggest decline in support came as women prepared to return to work, with only **46%** feeling well supported at this stage. Many described feeling left in the dark, with little communication or clarity around what to expect, making an already emotional transition feel more uncertain.

Keeping in Touch (KIT) days reflected this inconsistency

**62%**

used at least some KIT days

**15%**

said they were either not offered them or were unaware they existed.

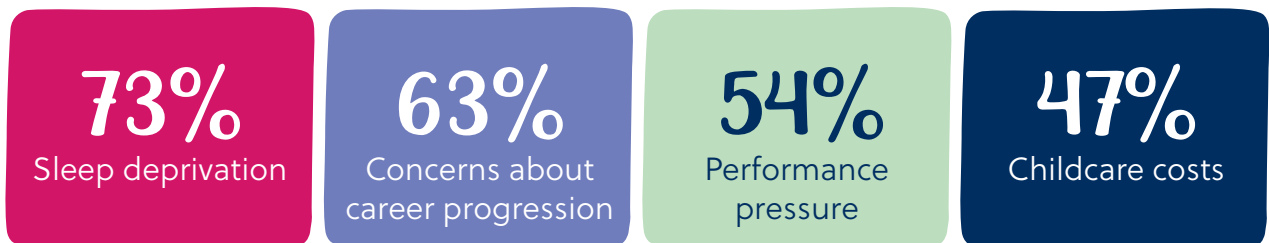


### Challenges do not end once women return

Support often remained unchanged after women came back to work, with only **46%** still feeling well supported. Much of the support women received continued to rely on individuals rather than consistent systems:



At the same time, many were juggling significant challenges:



In fact, only **2%** of respondents reported no challenges.





### Poorly handled returns affect both women and organisations

When support fell short, the impact was felt long after someone returned to work. More than half (**52%**) said it negatively affected their mental wellbeing, while **44%** felt it impacted their ability to perform at work. Many described losing confidence because of poor planning, unclear expectations and a lack of support.

Too often, women felt expected to return as though nothing had changed, without the time or structure to rebuild confidence or adjust to a new reality.



There was no reintroduction to changes... I had to chase everything rather than having a full 'induction' after a year off.

Where support worked well, it was considered: planned early, clearly structured and genuinely flexible.



I was able to do a phased return... which was easier on both me and my baby.

The impact on organisations was also significant. Nearly half (**47%**) said poor support affected their intention to stay.



## Policy and culture: Why support varies so widely

### Support is inconsistent and too often comes down to luck rather than design

Policies exist but women don't know about them. Only **46%** believed their organisation had a relevant policy. Almost a third (**31%**) thought none existed, while **23%** were unsure.

Even where policies do exist, they're often hard to find. As a result, women miss out on support that could make a real difference.

One anonymous respondent described the cost of this lack of visibility:



I texted my manager to tell him [about my miscarriage]. He was very kind and supportive and said I could take 'personal' time off. The company had a miscarriage policy in place, but I wasn't made aware of this - had I known, I think 2 weeks off could have really helped my mental health in the long term.

Communication is a clear gap. **Two thirds of women said their organisation didn't explain what support was available**, and only **21%** recall receiving any information.

This lack of communication hits some groups harder: **77%** of lower income employees said they received no information, compared to **59%** of higher earners, widening the gap in who can actually access support.

### Culture shapes whether women speak up and get support

**4 in 10 (40%)** women described their workplace culture as closed or uncomfortable when talking about pregnancy, loss and early parenthood. This silence often added to distress and made it harder for women to ask for or receive support.



My manager had no idea what to say and what I might need. I don't blame the individual but the support was awful and no one felt it was their place to ask what I might need as it felt too much of a taboo to ask.

## Support exists through Employee Resource Groups, but remains invisible

Some organisations offered wellbeing, parenting or carers' networks, but awareness of these was low:

**29%** recognised a mental health or wellbeing group

**24%** knew of a parenting or carers' network

**4%** were aware of fertility or baby loss groups

Across all questions about networks, the most common answer was "I don't know" (**48%**), suggesting that visibility, not just provision, was a major problem.

Employees from lower income households were far more likely to be unaware of any networks (**59%**, compared with **42%** of higher earners).

## Without systems, support becomes inconsistent

The gaps between support and system show low visibility, weak communication and limited capability are why experiences vary so widely. Without clear structures, support depends on individual managers. That makes it inconsistent, fragile and uneven, particularly for those with fewer resources or flexibility.

Where organisations get this right, the difference is clear. Where they don't, women are left to navigate pregnancy, loss and return largely alone with real impact on wellbeing, performance and retention.

Compassion alone isn't enough. Without clear, accessible systems, even the best intentions fall short and both the women and organisations pay the price.

## Training is largely absent

Training emerged as the weakest part of organisational support.

**Just 3%** of respondents said their organisation offered any training related to pregnancy loss or baby loss.

Many said the absence of training left managers unsure what to do - and employees unsure what they were entitled to.

My line manager having had some training and/or there being a process for loss just as there is for live childbirth would have made a significant difference. Navigating non-policies and relying on favours from other senior members of the team to get the time I needed was really tricky.

Without training or clear guidance, managers relied on personal empathy rather than organisational support.

My line manager after I returned to work was lovely and did as much as she could but there wasn't (and still isn't) any process or resources in place to ease back returning to work for mothers. It relied on one's empathy and knowledge.

## Recommendations for employers

These recommendations target the moments where support most often falls short across pregnancy, baby loss and the return to work. Grounded in employee insight, they provide a clear, practical framework for consistent, compassionate support where it matters most.

### The 5 S's: What good support looks like

#### Structure

##### **Make support clear and consistent.**

Set the standard with clear, easy to find policies covering pregnancy, loss, parental leave and return to work. Keep them simple, proactively shared, and make structured return to work planning the norm - not the exception.

#### Skills

##### **Equip managers to respond well.**

Empathy alone isn't enough. Train managers to handle sensitive conversations, apply policies consistently, adjust workloads and support phased returns - turning intent into meaningful action.

#### Space

##### **Build in flexibility and adjustment**

Flexibility, adjusted duties and manageable workloads should be a given during pregnancy, after loss and on return to work. Where roles allow less flexibility, offer practical alternatives.

#### Signposting

##### **Make support visible and easy to access**

Support only works if people can find it. Regularly and clearly signpost Employee Assistance Programmes, counselling, occupational health and external specialists. Ensure communications are purposeful and consistent.

#### Supportive culture

##### **Normalise open, compassionate conversation.**

Leadership sets the tone. By role-modelling compassion and normalising conversations around pregnancy, loss and early parenthood, organisations build trust and reduce stigma. This culture shift underpins engagement, productivity and morale.

##### **Specialist support matters!**

Employers can strengthen support by signposting to organisations such as; Tommy's, Miscarriage UK, Sands, Petals and Fertility Matters at Work offering expert, independent help alongside workplace provision.

## Conclusion

Support during pregnancy, baby loss and early parenthood is still too often shaped by individual managers rather than embedded within organisational culture and systems.

Compassion and goodwill are frequently there, but without clear policies, capable managers and consistent support, the consequences can be significant - affecting wellbeing, confidence, retention and women's ability to thrive at work.

The organisations that lead will be those that make support clear, consistent and visible when it matters most. In doing so, they will not only create a better experience for people, they will also strengthen retention, protect valuable skills and expertise, improve engagement and productivity, and build workplaces where employees feel valued, supported and more likely to stay.



Tommy's is here, ready to support organisations in transforming their workplace to be inclusive for all parents and families.

To find out more contact the team at [PregnancyAtWork@tommys.org](mailto:PregnancyAtWork@tommys.org).



My husband and I work for the same company. When I went into spontaneous labour in June 2025 and sadly lost my beautiful daughter, I had been working there for just under 26 weeks. I knew our company offered full pay bereavement leave at any gestation in pregnancy regardless of length in service. However I wasn't sure if I would be able to claim company maternity pay.

I was very fortunate that the company chose to support me with company maternity leave which included 6 months of full pay. Both my husband and I also received bouquets of flowers for our daughter from our company. Maternity leave without your child is a uniquely painful experience. Having that protected time allowed us more space to grieve and reconnect with one another without the added pressure of returning to work. I'll forever be grateful that in the earliest days of grief, our company chose compassion.

**Dolly Valentine (pictured)**

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