

BeyondEAP

Specialist employee support
when life gets complex

Real HR Challenges

12 situations HR teams never expected to face
and how to support employees through them

Supporting employees through life's most
significant transitions since 2014



BeyondEAP

Introduction

Most HR situations are familiar.

Managing absence, performance concerns, workplace relationships and employee wellbeing are all part of everyday working life.

Occasionally, however, a situation lands on your desk that leaves you thinking:

"We've never dealt with this before."

Perhaps an employee has experienced baby loss.

Perhaps someone has received a cancer diagnosis.

Perhaps an employee is suddenly caring for a parent with dementia, struggling with fertility treatment, facing a coroner's court, or returning to work following trauma.

These situations often affect far more than attendance or performance. They can impact confidence, identity, wellbeing, relationships and an employee's ability to function both at work and at home.

The purpose of this guide is not to provide legal advice or clinical guidance.

Instead, it aims to help HR and People teams better understand some of the complex employee situations organisations increasingly encounter and offer practical considerations for supporting employees compassionately and effectively.

Since 2014, Beyond EAP has supported employees across law firms, professional services, healthcare, technology and corporate organisations through some of life's most significant transitions.



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The Challenges Covered in This Guide

01 Returning to Work After Baby Loss

02 Going Through IVF

03 Diagnosed with Cancer

04 Sudden Hearing Loss

05 Caring for a Parent with Dementia

06 Facing a Coroner's Court

07 Returning After Severe Burnout

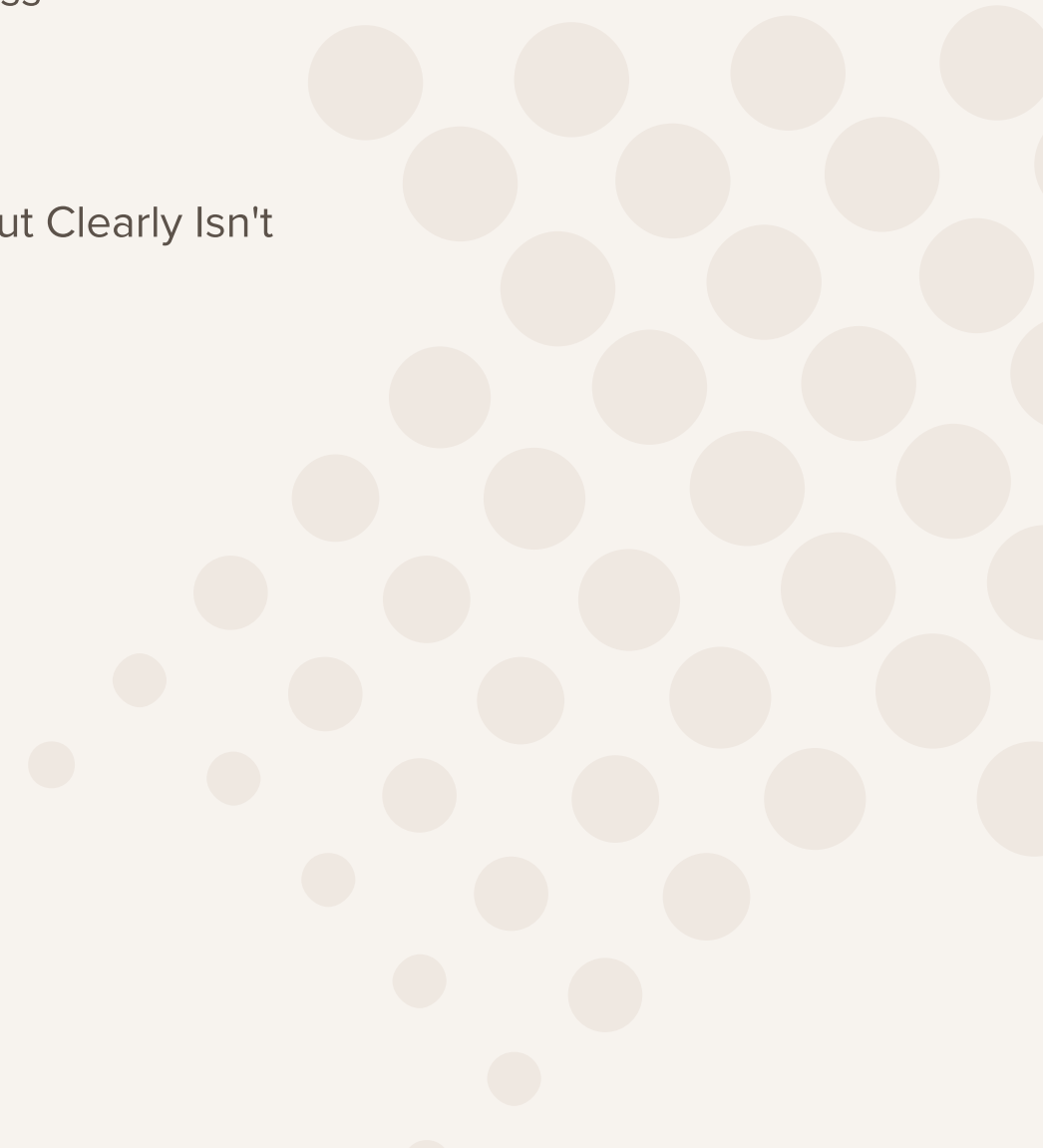
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Challenge 01

Returning to Work After Baby Loss

What HR may observe

- Reduced confidence
- Difficulty concentrating
- Anxiety about returning
- Fear of colleagues' reactions
- Emotional triggers in the workplace

What helps

- Sensitive return-to-work conversations
- Agreement about what colleagues will be told
- Flexible expectations during the initial transition
- Access to specialist emotional support
- Regular check-ins with a trusted manager

Questions HR can ask

- How would you like colleagues to be informed?
- What support would feel most helpful during your return?
- Are there any adjustments that would make things easier?

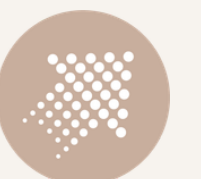
Common mistake

Treating the return as a standard sickness absence process.

Why this situation is different

Returning to work after baby loss is often emotionally complex. Whilst colleagues may see a return to work as a sign someone is moving forward, many employees continue to experience grief, anxiety and emotional triggers long after their return. Pregnancy announcements, conversations about children and significant dates can all become unexpected reminders of loss.

Taking time to understand individual needs can make a significant difference to confidence, wellbeing and successful reintegration into the workplace.





Going Through IVF

What HR may observe

- Increased medical appointments
- Emotional highs and lows
- Fatigue
- Anxiety around outcomes
- Reluctance to disclose treatment

What helps

- Flexibility around appointments
- Privacy and confidentiality
- Manager awareness and understanding
- Realistic expectations during treatment cycles
- Emotional support where appropriate

Questions HR can ask

- Is there anything we can do to support you during treatment?
- How would you like us to manage appointments and time away from work?
- Is there anything you would prefer colleagues not to know?

Common mistake

Assuming fertility treatment is solely a medical issue.

Why this situation is different

For many employees, fertility treatment affects every aspect of life. The emotional impact can include hope, disappointment, uncertainty, anxiety and grief, often all within a short period of time. Treatment schedules can be unpredictable and outcomes uncertain.

Employees frequently tell us that simply feeling understood and not having to explain themselves repeatedly can make a significant difference during this process.





Challenge 03

Diagnosed with Cancer

What HR may observe

- Shock
- Fear about the future
- Concerns about work and income
- Changes in confidence
- Emotional overwhelm

What helps

- Open and compassionate communication
- Individualised support plans
- Flexibility around treatment
- Practical and emotional support
- Ongoing conversations as circumstances change

Questions HR can ask

- What information would you like shared with colleagues?
- How can we best support you over the coming weeks and months?
- Are there particular concerns you would like us to be aware of?

Common mistake

Focusing only on treatment dates and medical appointments.

Why this situation is different

A cancer diagnosis often affects far more than physical health. Employees may experience fear, uncertainty, loss of confidence and concerns about identity, relationships and the future. The emotional impact frequently continues long after treatment has ended and can affect return-to-work planning, confidence and wellbeing.

The most effective support recognises both the practical and emotional realities employees may be navigating.





Challenge 04

Sudden Hearing Loss

What HR may observe

- Withdrawal from meetings
- Reduced confidence
- Increased fatigue
- Frustration
- Feelings of isolation

What helps

- Workplace adjustments
- Understanding from managers and colleagues
- Patience during the adjustment process
- Access to specialist support
- Recognition of the emotional impact

Questions HR can ask

- Are there adjustments that would make communication easier?
- How are you finding meetings and conversations at work?
- Is there any additional support that would help?

Common mistake

Assuming hearing aids or technology solve everything.

Why this situation is different

Sudden hearing loss can be life-changing. Alongside the practical challenges of communication, many people experience grief, anxiety, loss of confidence and uncertainty about the future. Hearing loss is often invisible to others, which can make it difficult for colleagues to fully appreciate its impact.

A supportive workplace can play a significant role in helping employees adjust and regain confidence.





Challenge 05

Caring for a Parent with Dementia

What HR may observe

- Exhaustion
- Increased stress
- Difficulty concentrating
- Emotional overwhelm
- Last-minute emergencies and appointments

What helps

- Flexible working arrangements where possible
- Compassionate and ongoing conversations
- Understanding from managers
- Access to emotional support
- Recognition of caring responsibilities

Questions HR can ask

- How are things changing for you at the moment?
- What practical support would make the biggest difference?
- Are there particular times that feel more challenging?

Common mistake

Viewing the situation solely through a performance lens.

Why this situation is different

Supporting a parent with dementia can be emotionally and physically exhausting. Employees often find themselves balancing work alongside caring responsibilities, medical appointments, difficult decisions and anticipatory grief. The situation may continue for years, creating sustained pressure and emotional strain.

Employees frequently tell us they feel torn between wanting to perform well at work whilst also supporting a loved one whose needs are becoming increasingly complex.





Challenge 06

Facing a Coroner's Court

What HR may observe

- Anxiety
- Hypervigilance
- Difficulty sleeping
- Emotional exhaustion
- Fear about the hearing

What helps

- Practical flexibility
- Understanding around preparation and hearing dates
- Trauma-informed support
- Compassionate communication
- Recognition that support may be needed long after proceedings conclude

Questions HR can ask

- Is there anything we can do to reduce pressure during this period?
- Would flexibility around upcoming dates be helpful?
- What support would feel most useful at the moment?

Common mistake

Assuming support is only needed around the hearing itself.

Why this situation is different

Coroner's Courts often follow sudden, traumatic or unexpected deaths. Employees may spend months preparing statements, reviewing events and anticipating difficult evidence. The emotional impact can be significant and may continue well beyond the conclusion of proceedings.

Whilst others may view the hearing as the end of a process, employees often describe it as another stage in their grief or trauma journey.





Challenge 07

Returning After Severe Burnout

What HR may observe

- Reduced confidence
- Fear of returning
- Emotional exhaustion
- Difficulty setting boundaries
- Worry about becoming unwell again

What helps

- Realistic expectations
- Clear priorities
- Gradual reintegration where possible
- Manager support
- Coaching around resilience and boundaries

Questions HR can ask

- What concerns do you have about returning?
- What would help you feel more confident?
- Are there adjustments that would support your recovery?

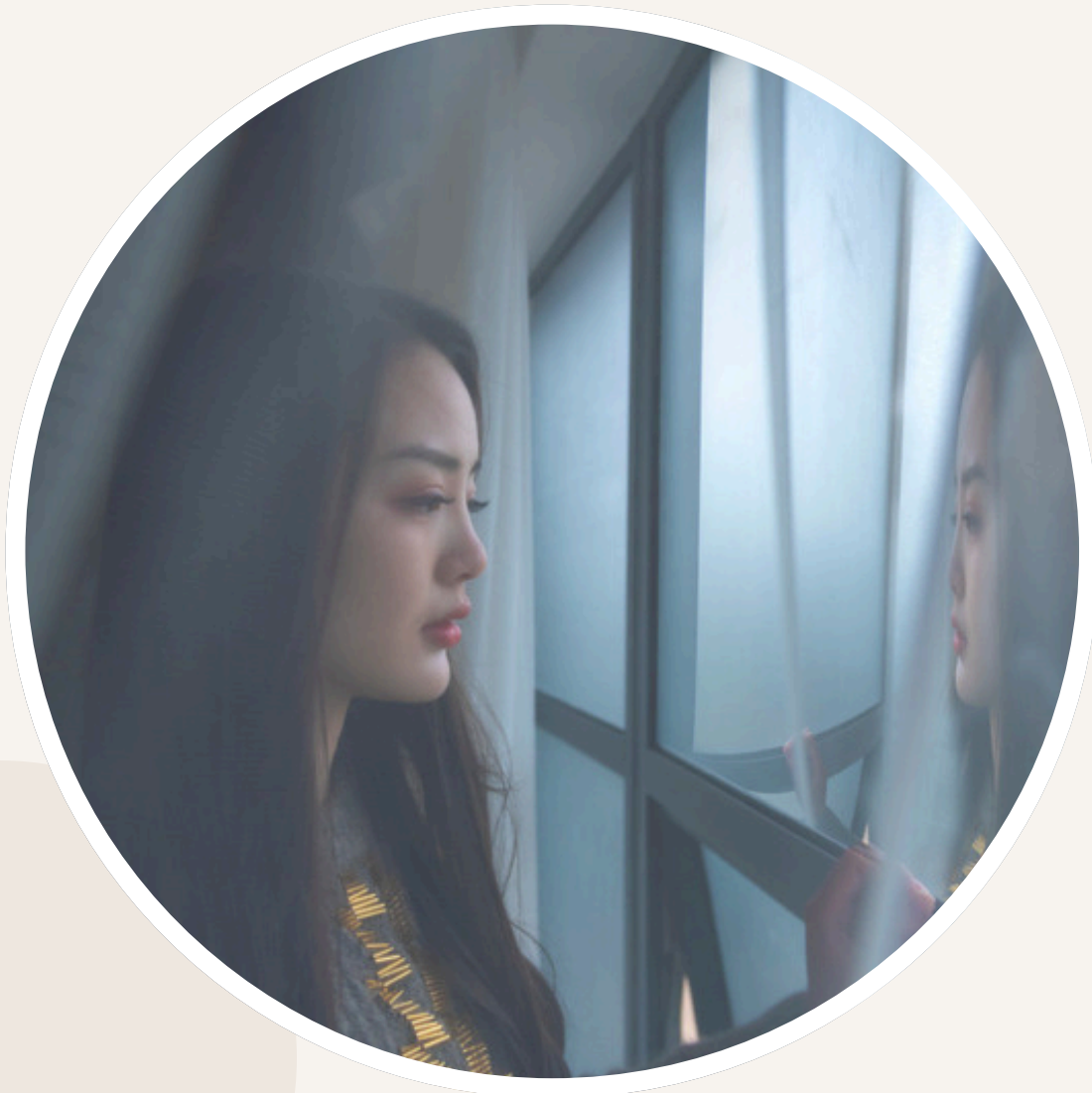
Common mistake

Assuming burnout is resolved simply because someone has returned to work.

Why this situation is different

Burnout rarely develops overnight and recovery is often gradual. Employees may return feeling physically present but emotionally fragile. Many worry about repeating the same patterns that contributed to burnout in the first place.

Successful returns often involve helping employees rebuild confidence, establish healthier boundaries and develop more sustainable ways of working.





Challenge 08

Pregnant After Multiple Miscarriages

What HR may observe

- Anxiety
- Hypervigilance
- Difficulty feeling optimistic
- Emotional uncertainty
- Frequent medical appointments

What helps

- Compassionate conversations
- Flexibility around appointments
- Understanding from managers
- Specialist emotional support
- Avoiding assumptions

Questions HR can ask

- How would you like us to support you during your pregnancy?
- Is there anything that would make work feel easier at the moment?
- How would you prefer us to communicate with you?

Common mistake

Assuming a pregnancy automatically brings reassurance after previous losses.

Why this situation is different

Pregnancy after loss can be emotionally complex. Whilst colleagues may see a positive pregnancy as good news, many employees continue to experience significant anxiety throughout the pregnancy. Milestones that others celebrate can become sources of worry and fear.

Feeling understood rather than pressured to feel positive can make a meaningful difference.





Challenge 09

Supporting a Child with Additional Needs

What HR may observe

- Caring pressures
- Increased appointments
- Fatigue
- Emotional strain
- Difficulty balancing competing demands

What helps

- Flexible working where possible
- Manager understanding
- Recognition of caring responsibilities
- Emotional support
- Practical conversations about workload

Questions HR can ask

- What support would make the biggest difference?
- Are there particular challenges you're managing currently?
- How can we help you balance competing responsibilities?

Common mistake

Assuming caring responsibilities end outside working hours.

Why this situation is different

Many parents of children with additional needs manage a constant cycle of appointments, assessments, therapies and advocacy alongside their professional responsibilities. The emotional load can be significant and often invisible to colleagues.

Supportive workplaces help employees feel understood rather than judged for challenges beyond their control.





Challenge 10

Facing a Family Member's Terminal Illness

What HR may observe

- Emotional exhaustion
- Increased caring responsibilities
- Difficulty concentrating
- Anticipatory grief
- Unpredictable availability

What helps

- Flexibility where possible
- Compassionate conversations
- Understanding from managers
- Emotional support
- Ongoing check-ins as circumstances change

Questions HR can ask

- How are things for you at the moment?
- What would help reduce pressure during this period?
- Are there any practical adjustments we can make?

Common mistake

Only recognising support needs once a bereavement has occurred.

Why this situation is different

When a loved one receives a terminal diagnosis, employees often begin grieving long before the loss itself. Alongside emotional distress, many find themselves navigating hospital appointments, caring responsibilities, difficult family conversations and uncertainty about the future.

Employees frequently describe feeling as though they are living in two worlds at once — trying to remain professional at work whilst coping with a deeply personal situation at home.

Supportive employers recognise that the impact often begins long before bereavement leave is required.





Challenge 11

Involved in a Critical Incident

What HR may observe

- Shock
- Anxiety
- Hypervigilance
- Difficulty sleeping
- Reduced concentration
- Emotional numbness

What helps

- Early support
- Trauma-informed conversations
- Practical flexibility
- Specialist intervention where appropriate
- Ongoing monitoring and support

Questions HR can ask

- How are you coping day-to-day?
- What support would feel most helpful right now?
- Is there anything we should be aware of moving forward?

Common mistake

Assuming that because someone appears calm they are unaffected.

Why this situation is different

Critical incidents can include serious accidents, traumatic events, violence, sudden deaths, workplace incidents or events affecting employees outside work.

Trauma responses vary significantly from person to person. Some employees may appear unaffected initially and only experience difficulties weeks or months later.

Early intervention and access to appropriate support can significantly reduce the longer-term impact of trauma and help employees feel safer and more supported throughout their recovery.





Challenge 12

The Employee Who Says They're Fine but Clearly Isn't

What HR may observe

- Withdrawal from colleagues
- Reduced engagement
- Increased irritability
- Changes in behaviour
- Declining confidence
- Reduced performance

What helps

- Gentle curiosity
- Psychological safety
- Consistent manager support
- Opportunities to talk without pressure
- Access to specialist support

Questions HR can ask

- How are things for you at the moment?
- Is there anything affecting you that you'd like support with?
- What would be most helpful right now?

Common mistake

Waiting until performance becomes a problem before having a conversation.

Why this situation is different

Many employees become skilled at masking difficulties. They continue attending work, meeting deadlines and appearing to cope whilst privately managing significant challenges.

These challenges may include grief, illness, caring responsibilities, relationship difficulties, financial worries, burnout or trauma.

Often, the most powerful intervention is not having all the answers. It is creating a safe environment where employees feel able to speak honestly and seek support before difficulties escalate.



How Beyond EAP Can Help

Behind every referral is a person navigating one of life's most significant transitions.

At Beyond EAP, we provide specialist, workplace-aware support that helps employees navigate parenthood, health challenges, trauma, loss, burnout and major life transitions whilst enabling organisations to retain talent, reduce absence and support sustainable performance.

Our specialist services include:

Parental Coaching & Family Building

Supporting employees through fertility treatment, pregnancy, parental leave, adoption, neurodiverse parenting and successful return-to-work transitions.

Trauma, Loss & Bereavement

Compassionate support following bereavement, pregnancy loss, traumatic events, critical incidents and complex grief.

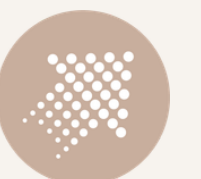
Post-Diagnosis Health Coaching

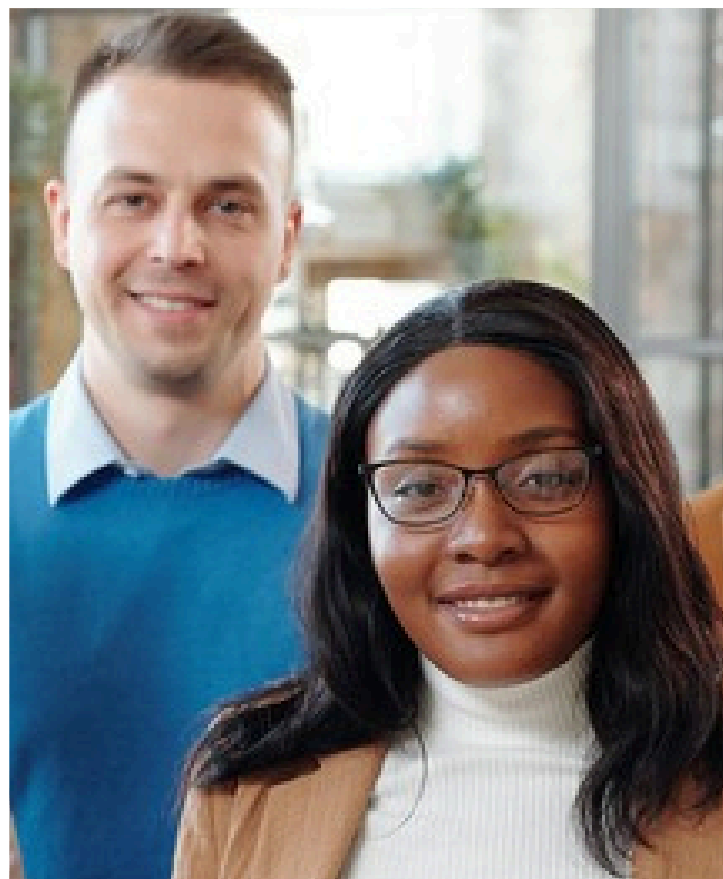
Helping employees navigate serious diagnoses, chronic illness, hearing loss and significant health challenges.

Complex Employee Challenges

Supporting employees through situations that often fall beyond traditional wellbeing support and require a more specialist, personalised approach.

“Beyond EAP has really helped many of our employees...giving them confidence to address the challenges returning to work can bring. The team has also worked with people to help them cope with bereavement, which has been invaluable and to those facing an uncertain future.”





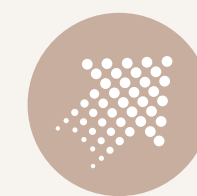
Let's Start a Conversation

If you're facing a situation that feels complex, sensitive or unfamiliar, you don't need to navigate it alone. Let's have a conversation.

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