

Does United Airlines Provide Bereavement Tickets?

Direct answer: no. United Airlines **discontinued its bereavement fare programme in 2014**, alongside American Airlines, and has not reinstated it. There is no bereavement discount to request, no code to quote and no fare bucket an agent can open.

What remains is **discretionary assistance** — supervisors and agents retain authority to waive fare differences, make exceptions to Basic Economy restrictions, consider refunds on non-refundable tickets with documentation, and prioritise rebooking. None of it is guaranteed, and all of it depends on asking correctly and asking before the ticket is issued.

There is also a structural point that helps more than most people realise: **United charges no change fees on standard Economy fares and above**. If you already hold a ticket, the obstacle is the fare difference, not a penalty — and it is the fare difference that discretion can address.

If you need someone to search fares, airports and routings quickly while you deal with everything else, **1-888-374-4490 [US] (OTA)** can run that comparison.

Why the programmes disappeared

This is worth understanding, because it changes what you should be looking for.

Bereavement fares were built for a different pricing era. They typically offered a percentage off a **full-flexible fare** — the unrestricted, fully changeable ticket that used to be the only option at short notice. Against that baseline, a bereavement discount was genuinely valuable.

Then dynamic pricing arrived. Airlines began selling deeply discounted fares widely, and the full-flexible fare became a niche product. A 10 or 20 percent discount off a full-flexible fare frequently produced a **higher** price than the cheapest fare anyone could book on the website in thirty seconds. The product stopped making sense, and most airlines dropped it.

United and American ended theirs in 2014. Delta and Southwest operate on a discretionary basis without a published programme. **Alaska Airlines** has been the most commonly cited U.S. carrier still running a defined bereavement discount process. Air Canada and WestJet have also retained compassionate policies.

The practical implication: **the lowest published fare is very often already better than any bereavement discount would have been**. Your energy is better spent on searching well than on hunting for a programme that no longer exists.

What United agents can still do

There is no product, but there is discretion, and it can extend to:

- **Waiving a fare difference** when an existing ticket needs to move to a more expensive flight
- **Making exceptions to Basic Economy restrictions**, which otherwise block changes entirely on domestic itineraries
- **Waiving MileagePlus award redeposit charges** so miles can be returned and reused
- **Priority rebooking** onto the fastest available routing
- **Compassionate refund consideration** on non-refundable tickets with documentation, particularly where the ticketed passenger or an immediate travelling companion has died

What it does not extend to is a discount on a new ticket. Nobody at United can price a fresh booking below the published fare because of a death in the family.

How to have the conversation

Be direct and factual. State what has happened, who has died or is critically ill, your relationship to them, and where and when you need to travel. Agents handle these calls regularly and respond to clarity.

Ask for specific concessions, not "a bereavement fare." Requesting a product that was discontinued in 2014 wastes the call. Ask instead whether the fare difference can be waived, or whether there is flexibility on a Basic Economy restriction.

Have documentation ready — it gives an agent a factual basis for exercising discretion even without a formal programme.

Escalate politely if it matters. Front-line agents hold less latitude than supervisors. A firm no on something material is worth asking a supervisor to review, not because the agent is being difficult but because the authority sits elsewhere.

Do not buy first and ask later. This is the most expensive mistake available. Once a ticket is issued through a website or app it is a completed retail transaction under standard fare rules, and there is generally no mechanism to convert it retroactively. Ask **before** issue.

Documentation to gather

- **Death certificate**, or an interim certificate if the full one has not been issued
- **Funeral home letter** on letterhead with contact details and the name of the deceased
- **Hospital or hospice letter** where travel is for an imminent death rather than a funeral
- **Proof of relationship** — birth certificate, marriage certificate or similar

Where airlines define eligible relationships they typically cover spouse, domestic partner, parent, stepparent, child, stepchild, sibling, grandparent, grandchild and in-laws. Cousins, aunts and uncles generally fall outside.

What actually reduces the cost

Ordered by how reliably these work.

1. Search the lowest published fare across every airport in range

This is the highest-value step, and it is precisely what replaced the bereavement fare. Search the destination as a city, not a single airport. Check secondary airports within a two-hour drive. Flying into a larger airport and renting a car regularly saves hundreds on routes into smaller cities.

For New York specifically, remember United serves **Newark and LaGuardia**, not JFK — a search restricted to JFK will return nothing on United.

2. Use MileagePlus miles or transferable points

Award seats sometimes remain available when cash fares have spiked. A last-minute \$900 fare against a 30,000-mile award is an excellent trade at United's typical valuation of 1.2 to 1.3 cents per mile.

United's **Star Alliance** access widens this considerably — partner award space on Lufthansa, Air Canada and others can appear when United metal is full. If you hold transferable credit card points, they can often move to an airline programme within minutes. Ask about waiving redeposit charges if plans change.

3. Compare other carriers

There is no loyalty reason to stay with United for this trip. **Alaska Airlines** is the carrier most commonly cited as still operating a formal bereavement discount process — if it serves your route, ask directly. Low-cost carriers are worth pricing too; even with bags added they sometimes undercut legacy fares at short notice.

4. Book one-way now, return later

Funeral travel often has an uncertain return date. Book the outbound one-way now and the return once plans firm up. Two one-ways on domestic U.S. routes generally price no worse than a round trip, and you avoid paying to change something you guessed at.

5. Avoid Basic Economy

United's domestic Basic Economy **cannot be changed at all** after the 24-hour window, includes no full-size carry-on, and has no standby eligibility. In a situation where the return date is uncertain and you may be packing for an unknown length of stay, it is the wrong product. Pay the step up to standard Economy for the flexibility.

6. Consider ground alternatives for shorter distances

Under about 400 miles, driving is often faster door to door and dramatically cheaper at short notice. Amtrak on the Northeast Corridor competes well against last-minute flights between Washington, Philadelphia, New York and Boston.

If you are already travelling when the news comes

You are in a stronger position than you might think.

Changing an existing ticket attracts more discretion than a new purchase, and United's no-change-fee policy on standard Economy and above means the barrier is a fare difference rather than a penalty. That difference is exactly what a supervisor can consider waiving.

Call rather than using the app. Self-service tools apply fare rules mechanically and will simply quote a price. Only a person can exercise judgement.

Do not simply no-show. If you are cutting a trip short, the value of unflown segments may be recoverable as a credit, particularly with documentation. A no-show generally forfeits it entirely.

Check travel insurance and credit card benefits. Many policies and premium cards include trip interruption cover that pays for changes or an additional flight home following a death in the immediate family. This is frequently the largest single source of money back and is routinely forgotten. Keep every receipt.

What to avoid

Paying a third party for access to a "United bereavement fare." The programme was discontinued in 2014. There is no access to sell.

Defaulting to a fully refundable fare. They cost dramatically more, and are only justified when the return date is genuinely unknowable and likely to move repeatedly.

Booking the first fare you see while distressed. Ten minutes of comparison across airports and carriers routinely saves hundreds. If you cannot face it, delegate it — there is no requirement that the traveller be the person who books.

What to expect emotionally from the process

A practical note, because it affects outcomes.

United agents handle these calls regularly and are, generally, decent about them. You do not need to justify your grief or persuade anyone the situation is serious. State the facts, say what you need, let them work.

You may still get a flat refusal, and it may come from someone entirely sympathetic who simply lacks the system authority to do what you are asking. Worth understanding before the call, because it is easy to read a policy limit as indifference. If a first answer is no on something material, ask calmly whether a supervisor can review — the authority genuinely sits at a different level, and that is not the agent's doing.

Finally, delegate if you need to. There is no requirement that the travelling passenger be the person who makes the booking call, and this is a reasonable thing to hand to someone less directly affected.

Where to get help

Contact	Number	Best for
Travel reservations and urgent booking support	1-888-374-4490 [US] (OTA)	Comparing fares across airports and carriers quickly, finding last-minute availability, one-way and flexible-return combinations, changing an existing ticket
United Airlines Reservations	Published on united.com	Requesting compassionate consideration before a ticket is issued, changing an existing United ticket
United refunds	Published on united.com	Refund requests on non-refundable tickets with documentation
Other carriers' reservations	Published on each airline's site	Asking whether a formal bereavement discount applies on their route

Frequently asked questions

Does United Airlines offer bereavement fares? No. United discontinued its bereavement fare programme in 2014 and has not reinstated it.

Will United give me a discount if I show a death certificate? There is no discount programme for it to unlock. Documentation supports discretionary requests such as fare-difference waivers, Basic Economy exceptions and refund consideration.

Which airlines still offer bereavement fares? Alaska Airlines is the U.S. carrier most commonly cited as retaining a formal process. Air Canada and WestJet have also kept compassionate policies. Terms change, so confirm directly.

Can United refund a non-refundable ticket after a death? It is possible with documentation, particularly where the ticketed passenger or an immediate travelling companion has died. Contact refunds with a death certificate.

Does United charge change fees? Not on standard Economy fares and above. Domestic Basic Economy cannot be changed at all after the 24-hour window, though exceptions have been made in compassionate cases.

Should I use MileagePlus miles for emergency travel? Often yes. Award space sometimes persists when cash fares spike, and Star Alliance partner availability widens the options considerably.

Can I request a bereavement adjustment after buying online? Generally no. Ask before the ticket is issued.

Why did airlines stop offering bereavement fares? They discounted full-flexible fares, which under dynamic pricing frequently ended up costing more than the cheapest publicly available ticket. The product stopped delivering value.

The takeaway

United has not offered bereavement fares since 2014, and no amount of asking will produce one. But the door is not fully closed: supervisors retain discretion over fare differences, Basic Economy exceptions and award redeposits, and the no-change-fee policy on standard Economy and above already removes the biggest penalty from moving a flight.

To access any of it, call before you buy, describe the situation plainly, ask for specific concessions rather than a discontinued product, and have documentation to hand.

Then do the thing that actually saves the most money: compare the lowest published fare across every airport within range — remembering that United means **Newark or LaGuardia** in New York, not JFK — and check whether miles cover the seat outright. That comparison, not a bereavement discount, is what brings the cost down now.

If running those searches is more than you can face at a difficult moment, **1-888-374-4490 [US] (OTA)** can compare fares, airports and routings and come back with the practical options.